

HIS OWN HOMETOWN



LARRY EVANS



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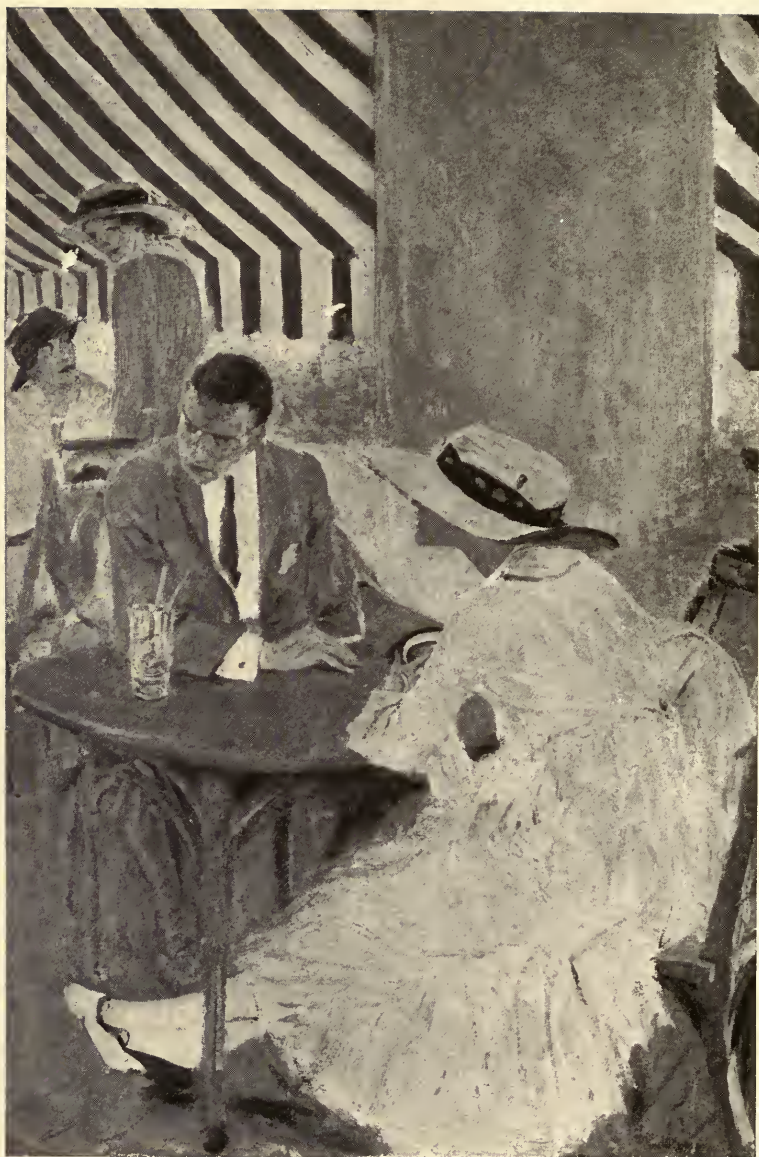
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Mother







"I'D RATHER YOU DIDN'T FEEL SORRY FOR ME
ANY LONGER"

HIS OWN HOME TOWN

BY
LARRY EVANS

AUTHOR OF

"ONCE TO EVERY MAN,"
"THEN I'LL COME BACK TO YOU," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY
HARVEY DUNN



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HIS OWN HOME TOWN

CHAPTER I

AS THE CURTAIN RISES

RAIN had fallen during the early afternoon, a wind-driven torrent, quite as much to be expected in that section, at that time of the year, as was the midday height of the mercury entirely seasonable. More than a few times the sun had broken through, only to be hidden immediately by the scudding clouds, which, dissolving, drove down in warm sheets, to splinter against the pavement like long and lancelike shafts of glass. And so, an hour after the storm had blown over as suddenly as it had come, there were still wet patches upon the cobblestones of the station square, even though the gutters had run off the last of the fouled and muddy water. Under the ardent August sun Front Street, to its juncture with Main five blocks north, lay sleek and shimmering, alike a mute reproach to the municipal department whose duty it was to maintain it in some such state of undefiled dignity on week days and a substantiation of "a few remarks" which T. E. Banks—T. Elihu—had risen

to voice at the last banquet of the Business Men's Association of Warchester, barely the night before. In spite of the nondescript character of some of the buildings which hemmed it, the broad, unbroken thoroughfare, deserted and Sabbath quiet, presented an aspect bordering upon the stately.

Perhaps to those listeners so unlucky as to be natives of a less blessed community—a special table marked Guests of Warchester had been set aside for them—many of T. Elihu Banks' statements might have savored of eulogy on that festal occasion. To scoff is human, and community patriotism, when it is based upon strictly hard and fast business logic, is not the most difficult thing in the world to understand. But there had been well-timed irony to offset the extravagance and rob it of all save figurative excellence; jocularly so seeming intimate that more than one harassed merchant, Hobbs, for instance, of the Hardware, or Wilburt, Drugs and Toilet Sundries, who had come hoping to hear a discussion of better ways and means of avoiding total insolvency, had gone away with a warm feeling instead, located somewhere in the general area beneath the top coat-pocket on the left-hand side. This emotion might best be described as a consciousness of tender, time-hallowed confidences common only to T. Elihu, the town's great man, and each individual who cherished it. So much for the abstract magic of the great man's oratory; concrete example of his

masterly phraseology, in the guise of quoted words themselves, is available.

"I have sat here to-night,"—Thus T. Elihu Banks, coming with majestic deliberation to his feet, opened his few remarks—"I have sat here and listened with conflicting emotions to all that our revered and eminently solid townsmen have had to say in regard to Warchester; its welfare, growth, prosperity—past, present and future."

Here he paused to frown upon several of those identical eminently solid ones, who, more or less disturbed by the monthly cash balance, had quite inadvertently allowed personal uncertainty to tinge their utterances anent Warchester, Five Years Ago, To-day and Five Years in the Future. To be sure the frown was playfully fierce and only mock ferocious. It did not betray, either in line of lip or brow, a probability that the Commonwealth Trust—T. Elihu Banks, President—might at no distant date deliberate long over a further extension of paper bearing the indorsement of those very alarmists, who, instead of quailing before its wrath, only straightened in their places at such honorable mention.

"—I have sat here to-night," to proceed with the remarks, "and, gentlemen, I want to tell you that I am scared! Yes, sir, plumb frightened and dismayed at the imminence of calamity which I am convinced—that is to say, *almost* convinced—threatens us, our

private integrity and continued public existence. Why, if—if it wasn't for the fact that the family sort of likes it here, I'd order my foreman out at the plant to quit work on that new weaveshed of mine; I'd lock up the doors of the Commonwealth; tell Latham, at that table over there in the corner, that he could have my share in the Construction and Contracting Company for any spare change he happened to have in his pocket, and get away from this feeble, tottering old invalid of a town before it goes all to smash!"

"Silence followed,"—quoting now from the columns of the Sunday issue of the *Daily Gazette* which had come, damp and smelling of ink, fresh from the presses only a few hours after the banquet's breaking up—"silence heavy and a little perturbed. Then laughter pattered around the room, increasing in volume until it shook the rafters as the meaning of Mr. T. Elihu Banks' pungent preface struck home. And when the thunder of mirth and applause had subsided somewhat, radiating the spirit of optimism and indomitable energy which has been so instrumental in making Warchester what she is to-day, our esteemed fellow-townsmen swung from the ironical vein of his introduction to a serious and comprehensive analysis of commercial Warchester . . . touching upon the changes, topographic and architectural which the last five years have witnessed, more than a few of which, it should be noted in

passing, stand as a monument to his personal love of the beautiful and finer things of life . . . and closing with a prophetic picture of what cooperation and honest endeavor may well be expected to bring, so vividly presented that quite a number of our estimable citizens besides Mr. Banks have decided not to go just yet, but to wait a while and see if things won't take a turn for the better."

This extract, a faithful example of the *Gazette's* trenchant style, was but a brief bit of the speech itself. Reported verbatim, with a cut of T. Elihu, it filled four columns. For if he was a little chary with vital statistics, such as might have comforted many, he did not slight what the *Gazette* happily chose to term the topographic and architectural changes. Swinging from the subject of the Trac-tion Company's new extension, which inevitably must result in a tide of profit from those rural regions hitherto untapped, to that of the new Main Street pavement, laid by the Construction and Contracting Company, he came by easy stages to a mention of the new home of the Commonwealth Trust. And here he was upon ground safe from foreign criticism, carping or covetous.

When T. Elihu Banks could not himself do a thing he paid the price of the man who he believed could do it for him. Fielding, an architect lately come to Warchester, had dreamed his plans unhandicapped by suggestion or ill-advised economy. And

the finished structure, of blue-veined marble, was vindication enough of the wisdom of such methods. Facing down Front Street, the building drew the eye from the chiseled atrocities of red sandstone which flanked it, like a fresh blank picket in a rotted, madly scroll-sawed fence. It dominated that thoroughfare to the very doors of the Union Station, quite overshadowing the martial group in the centre of the Common, a memorial to the valor of native sons in the days of '61.

True enough, this work of art, the product of the Home Granite Yards and T. Elihu Banks' gift to the city, was not a recent improvement, if it was to be accepted as an improvement at all. For a number of years the twice-life-size cannoneer, gun swab in hand, had been gazing defiance at all comers, friend and foe alike, who chanced to alight from any of the amazing number of trains which the principal speaker of the evening stated rolled past their threshold between the meridians, post and ante, but he was no fickle-minded fanatic, faithless to old gods and fawning upon the new. The statue was considered a very fine thing.

"This our monument to the dead and maimed and missing, mellowing now with the years (mellowing applying to the statue, of course). . . The resistless tramp of time which has decimated the ranks of those who survived. . . . The on-sweep of events which brooks neither faint heart nor faltering hand!"

It was neatly turned, the transition from romantic clash of arms to the more prosaic but no less terribly real strife of daily business life. Serving as a conclusion it sounded that note of pathos, of deep and human compassion, which sent more than a few home with that warm feeling aforementioned—beneath the top coat-pocket on the left-hand side. As they turned down Main Street, linked arm in arm, Hobbs of the Hardware expressed for the ears of Wilburt, Drugs and Toilet Sundries, fervidly albeit with less elegance than might have been employed, the opinion of all who had been among those present.

"A damned big-hearted man," said Hobbs. He had forgotten, temporarily, his low cash balance. "A damned big-hearted man. Where would you look to find another who has accomplished all that he has and still stayed tender-hearted?"

Wilburt's answer was in tune. "You'd look a long time, and then most likely fail."

And yet, the next morning, after the shower had subsided and the sun come out again, even to one who had not come under the spell of those rounded periods; to put it precisely, in the eyes of the lone commercial traveler upon the Bay State Hotel veranda, the typical, "overgrown town," New England city was far from ugly, far from unprepossessing.

He had been forced to forego his jump to

Providence because he dared not leave town without seeing Latham—J. J. Latham—personally, so one would reasonably have expected him to find nothing of excellence on the scene of his broken schedule. To the contrary, the sporting-page and the funny sheet of the *Sunday Gazette* perused in all seriousness of soul, and the Banks' address by way of amusement, this stranded alien, chair and stiff straw-hat tilted back at a dangerous angle, brown button shoes upon the rail, let the paper slide to the floor while he sighed his unqualified content.

He squinted from eyes very wise in such a round, cherubic countenance in the direction of the Common, pricked here and there with beds of poppies, all as surprisingly brilliant after the rain as a red-figured green carpet in the wake of a vacuum cleaner. The gunner and his mate who stood stanchly by, round shot in hand, would not be overlooked. Feeling the need of oral communion common to his kind the "drummer" addressed his words to this intrepid pair.

"Don't fire, boys," he admonished with indolent amiability, "till you see the whites of their eyes." A moment of thought. "And if you don't mind my asking, maybe you can tell me what's wrong with this town? Quiet and bucolic and restful would have been my verdict—if it wasn't for all these alibis they registered here last night."

Head on one side he waited as if for a reply, but

the gunner and his mate failed to unbend from their attitudes of hostile aloofness. A bluebottle fly buzzed with foolish persistence against a screen; flat upon his back on a baggage truck across the square a newsboy now and again opened his lips to drone "Pyper! *Globe—Transcrip'—G'zette!*" but the iteration was wholly mechanical, the disturbance negligible in the extreme. A peaceful, Sabbath quietude endured until a pair of high-checked gray horses, harnessed to a bulbous, plum upholstered barouche, rounded the Main Street corner and came swinging down Front, the clatter of their feet upon the pavement a marvellous imitation of those hoof-beats which trap drummers were wont to beat out upon their shells, for the added vividness it lent to motion-picture steeds.

Immediately the commercial traveler abandoned fruitless oral curiosity for ocular contemplation. (Even at a distance the turn-out was impressive.) Back in the hotel interior a gong clanged brassily—the first summons to dinner, for the Bay State clung to old custom—but he failed to respond. Quite otherwise he allowed his chair to cant slowly again upon all four legs. And Mr. Dodge, the hotel manager, chancing to glimpse this new attitude of interest, came out from behind his desk and started for the door.

"What is it, a fire?" he called through the open window, truculence in his voice and his manner too,

for in his experience guests of the brown clad one's ilk needed no second call, and he distrusted departure from precedent. "Can you see the smoke?"

He reached the open door just as the approaching equipage was entering the zone of its awe-compelling best. The truculence disappeared.

"Oh—ho!" He understood now—yes, indeed!—to be sure! His exclamation was commendatory, a verbal pat upon the back of the man discerning enough to forego food for such a sight. "Oh—*ho!* T. Elihu, eh? Now I wonder where he's bound? I hadn't heard that he was running out of town this week."

The commercial traveler leaned forward at that, his face less cherubic. In such wise he was accustomed to meet an argument of cheaper goods from a competitor, but neither of the frock-coated, shiny-tiled pair upon the rear seat of the barouche appeared aware of his keen gaze, or the worshipful one of Mr. Dodge, whose lips were slightly parted.

T. Elihu Banks, tremendous without being fat, ponderous for all his great height, sat well forward on the plum-colored cushion, stiffly erect and frigidly preoccupied. He fairly overwhelmed the one who shared his state and made him seem wisplike and tiny. His stare dwelt, with a frown near to lowering, upon a point midway between the horizon and the sun, now almost overhead. Yet he caught the first tentative move which Mr. Dodge upon the veranda

made toward salutation. A huge and pink and smooth-shaven face was turned in that direction; there was a glimpse of chilly eyes and padded flesh and lips sneering even in repose, while this new position was held for a breath. T. Elihu Banks thereupon inclined his head, a scant but perceptible inch—not necessarily a large effort, though the effect was rather wonderful so far as Mr. Dodge was concerned. Shedding his uncertainty the latter took an impetuous step or two forward; he made as if to reach for his hat, remembered its absence and fell back upon salute instead.

“Ha—ha! Good morning—good morning, sir! Hope you aren’t carrying out your threat and leaving us for good!”

There was nothing servile, nothing of calculated flattery in the well-timed pleasantry. It was merely an expression of respect and admiration by one who knew real worth when he looked upon it. That the town’s great man failed to respond in kind apparently discomfited Mr. Dodge not at all. T. Elihu rarely responded to such sallies, he had sufficient to occupy his mind, without the framing of airy persiflage. And for an alternate excuse, had one been required, there was the arrival of the 4.30 express from New York. Roaring into the station at the exact moment when the barouche circled up to the platform, it drowned out the now hopeful cry of the newsboy who had hopped down from the

baggage truck and trotted nearer, the laughter of Mr. Dodge, as mechanical and almost as mirthful as the clucking of an aimless hen, and all other indeterminate sounds. When the train had come to a standstill and the din subsided to a thin hiss of escaping steam, Mr. Dodge was heard to be laughing still and talking as well.

"Ha—ha! He's a great joker—T. Elihu. D'yuh read the address he made at the banquet last night to the Business Men's Association? If you haven't y'd better, for it's mighty interestin' readin'. Funny in spots, too—y'd ought to have heard 'em laugh. Said he was humbly proud to be identified with the name of Warchester—and I guess he hasn't got reason to be! He *is* Warchester. He's made this town what she is. Humbly proud! I'd like to have the wad he's got together for himself while he's been doing it."

"Humbly proud?" The commercial one meant no sacrilege; he felt that the pause required some answer. "He doesn't exactly hate himself, that's a fact. Why don't he do his running around in an automobile?"

"Can't afford one!" Vast chuckles on the part of Mr. Dodge, who ignored a note of possible disparagement, betrayed the source of this preposterous statement. "He can't afford one, T. Elihu can't! The wife has one, and her own chauffeur. And his boy drives a low white one with tub seats

and no fenders that goes like hell-a-bilin'. Most always has a mighty good-looking girl with him—J. J. Latham's daughter. But T. Elihu's so hard up he says he has to stick to the poor old nags!"

The "drummer" nodded. He renewed his consideration of the high-checked team, the stiff-necked coachman in buff and blue, the plum upholstery and nickel fittings, from a somewhat different mental angle. Here was undeniable grandeur, neither garish nor blatant, but "old-fashioned" if anything, and unquestionably "solid." He nodded again, appearing to have found a satisfactory reason for such out-of-date whimsy.

"A wise play, T. Elihu," he murmured. "I've got to hand it to you there." And in a louder voice for his host's ear: "Who's the rabbitty looking little cus with him?"

Mr. Dodge had no time to administer rebuke or even to smile pityingly upon one whose lack of culture and discernment permitted him so to characterize the Reverend Watson Duncan. For the big man's failure to clamber out of the barouche was indication that T. Elihu was not leaving town on a short business trip. He was expecting someone on that train. Already a scattering of day-coach passengers—less than the usual quota, for Sunday traffic was light—had bustled into sight, heading toward Main Street and home, hurrying from force of habit.

A moment or two passed without further developments. The raucous shouts of the engine crew could be heard from far up the yard where the engine was taking water. Mr. Dodge was on the point of sympathizing aloud with T. Elihu's disappointment, when his intensity of attention was rewarded. The figure which finally breezed around the station corner, preceded by a Pullman porter whose gleaming grin and officious solicitude bespoke a liberal tip, was worth waiting to see.

Vision as applied to things sartorial smacks distinctly of the feminine, and though there was nothing in the appearance of this young man in his earliest twenties to warrant such meaning being read into the word as applied to him, vision best describes him. The top-coat of creamy tan which he wore draped over his shoulders in careless ease, in spite of the heat, was of incredible breadth of skirt; a virtue under the circumstances, for far from veiling, it fell back with every stride and puff of wind, so that nothing was lost of the gorgeousness beneath—a gorgeousness contributed largely by a suit of black and white check, ultra modish and wondrous tight.

Long checkered lapels ran down to a single button a little below the waist line, which the coat clearly defined. The trousers, so narrow that almost all the fulness had been requisitioned by two knife-edge creases, ended a fair two inches above the low tan shoes, in cuffs of the same width. And below the

cuffs and above the lapels mauve hose and scarf added a further dash of color. No one needed to be told that the Panama and shoes were expensive. They looked it.

To complete the picture, he was swinging a thick, light-colored stick in one hand as he dashed into view, and leading with the other a white bull-terrier; or to be more exact, doing his best to restrain that high-bred animal which, straining every splendid muscle, fairly towed him in his wake.

"T. Elihu's son, Sidney," the manager of the Bay State flung information to his guest. "Sidney Estabrook Banks. T. Elihu married Sadie Estabrook—Estabrook steel and wire works——"

The explanation, however, was superfluous. Any stranger would have marked at first glance the likeness between father and son. There was the same chill light in the eyes, the same full and slightly sneering lips. The younger man's face was not yet florid but only pinkish—a shade not unlike the pink of the terrier's nose and ears. Abounding vitality, quite as exuberant as the dog's, could not overcome a suggestion of heavy-footed weight and padded flesh. It was this very exuberance, on the dog's part, which precipitated the only minor catastrophe that marred the occasion.

T. Elihu and the Reverend Duncan were out upon the platform now. The newsboy, silenced by such

opulence, was drawing nearer, mouth wide but hushed. Mr. Dodge foresaw the inevitable just before it happened.

"Git out of the way, there," he whispered frantically, waving his arms in an unmistakable "shooing" gesture. "Look out—look *out*——"

T. Elihu, attempting to avoid the dog's lusty lunges at the same instant when the newsboy, hoping to get in a surreptitious pat, had edged a little too close, suddenly set one square heel upon a bare foot. The boy howled his anguish to the skies.

At the outcry an expression frankly annoyed and intolerant of such clumsy interruption passed over the Reverend Duncan's countenance. Mr. Dodge's face became darkly suffused.

"There, I knew it!" he growled. "Why don't that fool boy get out from under foot!"

But the question was already bootless. The boy had done so, limpingly, falling back aghast before the rage of the huge one who, in a bull-voice, commanded that he efface himself. Then, ignoring the outstretched hand, T. Elihu seized his son by the shoulders. It was a bearlike embrace, spontaneous, shamelessly hearty and sentimental. The reverend gentleman's approval returned; his expression waxed benign. Even the porter, a child of the theatrical, played up to the best that was in him. His air of importance was increased by half.

The trio turned at length to the barouche. Sidney

seated himself back to the driver, beside a pile of luggage liberally besprinkled with labels and a golf-bag and canvas-covered tennis-racket. Now the porter was lifting his cap; the coachman flirted his whip and the grays started prancingly. The Reverend Watson Duncan was shaking hands with Sidney as they came around in a splendid circle. One of T. Elihu's remarkably soft and smooth hands lay upon his son's knee. It was an affecting sight. The drummer could not forego a small sigh and overhearing it, Mr. Dodge tore his eyes away to smile patronizingly upon him. Mine host had no way of knowing that the black-and-white checked suit was behind this breath of envy, and not a belated realization of inherent inferiority.

"I tell you it does a man good to see a thing like that once in a while," said Mr. Dodge. "Yes, sir, it certainly does. It—it's a sermon in itself, just as much as any the Reverend Duncan preaches—and he's some preacher, I'm here to state. I remember, now. Somebody did tell me that T. Elihu's son was studyin' too hard, and the old man'd sent for him to come home and rest a while. He's been away to school in New York—summer school. And don't T. Elihu think a lot of that boy? Did yuh see him grab him? A big-hearted man—a mighty big-hearted man! Where would you look to find one who has accomplished all that he has, and still stayed tender-hearted?"

The drummer apparently gave it up without a guess, for he made no immediate reply. A change, slight but significant, had come over this commercial one. He seemed to have grown very pensive.

"Why all the alibi?" was his sole comment, and as this was entirely mental it had no effect upon Mr. Dodge.

The barouche had turned to the right into Main Street, five blocks north; hopping on one foot the newsboy had reached the baggage-truck and was whimpering softly over his bruised toes, before the "drummer" spoke aloud. He jerked his thumb toward another figure in the shadow of the station corner which had come up in time to witness the last act of Sidney's reception—the Reverend Duncan's warm handclasp.

"Who's your other friend?" he asked.

Mr. Dodge halted. He had been about to return indoors. Now, as his gaze followed the drummer's pointing thumb his face hardened. Hatred no less bitter for all that it was impersonal, marred the softness of feature which the "sermon" had engendered. Oddly enough as he watched this expression grow, the "drummer" seemed to smile.

CHAPTER II

ENTER THE BLACK SHEEP

WARCHESTER'S dingy station-shed, unimpeachably the city gate in spite of the fact that it was never mentioned publicly unless such mention was unavoidable, and then without pride, roared to the passage of many trains. Fast-flying mails and expresses, boastful of every luxury and time-saving adjunct, which a feverish age could demand; slow-crawling locals, mean and lowly and seeming conscious of it—they came and went almost without cessation, achieving daily an astonishing total, bringing and bearing away every known manner of man.

Prominent politicians were wont to shake hands with a delegation of representative citizens from the observation platforms of their specials, or if the election was very close at hand, to linger long enough to extol the town's points of superiority, as well as those of their own doctrines. Few road companies, dramatic or musical, passed without a split week at least at the Palace Theater (the house could be calculated beforehand to a dollar if the attraction had stirred up a metropolitan discussion

as to its exact moral status). And now and again the city police surprised evidence that certain quiet-spoken gentlemen, finding other fields uncongenial, had paused to test the excellence of Warchester time-locks.

There came men of every creed, women of every code; the self-assured and self-seeking; the humble and the hungry; spellbinder and highbinder; bright-eyed light o' love and dull-eyed alien; those who spun their webs and waited; those who toiled and would continue to toil; the affluent who viewed the eye of the needle through the glass of their own magnified ego, the wretched who wondered why; exhorters beseeching alms for a distant cause, blandly blind to neighborhood need:—rich men and poor men and beggar men, and women in velvet gowns.

Every type that a polyglot civilization could produce drained daily through that dingy station-shed, for Warchester, located upon a trunk-line which connected the two greatest cities on the eastern seaboard, was like an eddy in a stream which never ceased to ebb and flow. Some bits of human flotsam found final lodgment in this backwash; more merely dallied for a time, to be caught up and spun on again by the current, and only one custom seemed common to them all. Each wore his stamp of caste or character upon his sleeve, if not a true one then that which was most likely to prove expeditious and remunerative in the end. Casual classification was

therefore easy, a virtue since complicated analysis was going out of vogue.

It was only because the arrival of Sidney Estabrook Banks had set him to moralizing that the "drummer" on the Bay State veranda vouchsafed the solitary figure at the station corner the second glance which led to conjecture.

Obviously he had descended from the same train which had brought that gorgeously attired young gentleman; just as obviously he had not enjoyed the ministrations of the porter and his brush. For his blue serge suit, shiny from long and faithful service, was covered with coal dust and cinders. And yet, just as a largeness of limb and gesture had been Sidney Banks' most compelling bid for notice, so was the first impression he gave one of immaculate cleanliness—a paradoxical thing, when one considered that he had come in "riding the blind."

In point of fact the need for water, both inside and out, had been preying upon his mind long before the train pulled into the station. A pause beneath the drip of the water-tank, the moment he crawled down from the forward coach, and not an excess of hand-luggage, had delayed his official appearance and robbed him of all save the last act of Sidney's welcome home—the Reverend Watson Duncan's warm and hearty handclasp.

His throat was free from dust now, his face and hands clean and white with an even pallor which,

coupled with his slenderness, made one wonder just how many hours had passed since he had tasted nourishing food; that is, if one was given to idle and fruitless surmise. And slender he was to a surprising degree, thin of waist and wrist and ankle. But either the matter of food was not troubling him, or else he had grown accustomed to a lack of fulness beneath his belt, for he seemed in no hurry.

Aimless would not have described him with exactitude. Indeed, as he stood in the shadow, shifting from one stiff leg to the other, he suggested rather an amiable though puzzled "super" in life's human comedy, watching from the wings the strutting principals upon the stage, thoughtfully groping for the secret of their acceptance, a little apologetic for his own very existence. A faint smile upon his supersensitive lips, mirthless as tears yet savoring not at all of such emotion, heightened this suggestion. His eyes were blue and fine and steady, mildly questioning and wistfully self-deprecatory. But his nose, thin and quite long, and one eyelid, were of a different quality. The latter member drawn half shut, a trick of thought apparently or a habit contracted while the scar which ran from brow to hair was healing, gave his face a peculiarly quizzical expression. It looked as though he was winking to himself over some choice and subtle whimsy all his own.

His abstraction was complete as he stood

watching the barouche disappear. He was equally unaware of his Bay State veranda audience and the newsboy on the truck, who had stopped whimpering to gape his interest again. Even to Mr. Dodge's first comment, growled to be sure but audible enough, failed to penetrate his serene selfconsciousness. No doubt it was just as well. The manager's words were neither dulcet nor overcordial.

"So you're back again, are you?" Malignance characterized the question, and not expectation of a reply. "Just when we were beginning to think we might be rid of you for good."

The "drummer" had enjoyed the change which his first query worked in the expression upon Mr. Dodge's face. He feigned not to notice this verbal venom in supplementing it.

"Then you know him, do you?" he asked.

"Know him! Who don't—in this town! That's Jimmy Gordon, the Reverend Watson Duncan's good-for-nothing stepson come home again. He's T. Elihu's nephew, too—Watson Duncan married Mathilda Gordon, T. Elihu's widowed sister. Like father, like son! Gordon, he never amounted to——"

Mr. Dodge would have elaborated his views on heredity, had not the "drummer" interrupted.

"No-o-o!" exclaimed he, and he succeeded in hiding all hint of malicious intent. "You don't say! T. Elihu's nephew—and the dominie's stepson?"

The round face came up suddenly. An awkward aspect of the situation had obtruded itself. "But why didn't they wait for him, and make the reunion complete? Why didn't they take him along—but then, of course, they weren't expecting him."

Mr. Dodge favored his transient guest with a flicker of suspicion. Soon or late, in his experience, such a person was sure to speak in disparagement of Warchester, its worthiest inhabitants, its habits and institutions. It was a characteristic of the breed, undoubtedly; one to be met with chill and cutting dignity. They invariably referred to Manhattan as the "big town;" to Warchester as a "nice little burg." Patronage was their most maddening weapon, insinuation their method of attack. So Mr. Dodge was set for the encounter when he turned, but the plump drummer's palpable innocence disarmed him. He fell back upon sarcasm.

"Expect him! Take him along! Say, I guess you haven't been very long in this town, have you? Otherwise you'd know that it's hard enough on the Reverend Duncan to have to own him as a son, even if it isn't a tie of blood; bad enough to have to feed and clothe him, without parading his shame publicly around the streets. And T. Elihu—" thought in that quarter may have rendered him speechless, or maybe he merely paused to dress his words in Sunday phrases—"well, you had a good look at him a minute ago. Big-hearted, but hard as granite when

he knows he's right, T. Elihu is. And he was set against his sister's marriage to Gordon from the first. If the truth's told I shouldn't wonder but what she's been praying for the last four months that he was gone for good—and little blame to her, either."

"Hum-m-m," murmured the drummer. "He doesn't look so—so—he doesn't look it. Kind of limp and dusty and done-out. But then," ostensibly wishing no argument, "but then, looks are always deceiving."

"You bet they are!"

Explosively emphatic but mollified, Mr. Dodge proceeded to give his attention to the one under discussion. The latter was still immobile, but solitary no longer, for he was being joined at that moment by a dog—odd coincidence, a dog which, compared with the white bull-terrier, paralleled the contrast which the drummer had been considering between the arrival in blue serge and the one in checkered plaid.

Not that the canine newcomer was less than a thoroughbred, or suffered by the comparison. If anything it was the reverse. His pink and whiteness once removed from sight, the bull-terrier was best remembered for his indiscriminate lavishment of affection. One forgot his perfection of bulging muscles, his splendid physical condition, in recalling how decidedly he had lacked poise, self-repression—the uncalculated carriage of the worldly-wise and

truly polished, which boisterous effort can never quite counterfeit.

This bearing the Airedale had and more, though his environment was not that of dog-biscuits and stiff bristle brushes to which the terrier belonged. Sophistication marked him, acquired in ways not necessarily pleasant, yet possessed without bitterness. He did not leap or fawn. His mind as he trotted into view was strictly upon his own affairs; his overture a non-committal sniff, tentative without seeming to be wary. One could imagine the boy with the quizzical nose and apologetic eyes prefacing a friendly advance with a smile just as uncertain.

The sniff proved satisfactory; the short and stumpy tail began jerkily to wag. But there the Airedale waited. Rebuff or recognition, it was for the other to bestow.

For an instant Jimmy Gordon made move toward neither. He stood looking down without clearly seeing the lean head and bristly body, for his mind was otherwise occupied. Then he blinked and recovered himself. Still deliberate, very gravely he squatted to the platform and drew the animal's head against his cheek. Lack of a welcome such as had awaited Sidney Banks, since he had expected none, had worked no unusual emotion in Jimmy Gordon. Realization that any living creature was glad of his return, even though it was only a dog, served to betray him into a rare surrender to impulse.

The Airedale was capable of understanding just how this was. In a lesser way he was a wanderer and unattached himself. His mouth lolled open; his body stiffened; the stumped tail thumped most mightily upon the planking. And when Jimmy Gordon straightened to his feet, brushing himself with mechanical care, his air which might have been called aimless, had given way to another, still unhurried and abstracted, but unmistakably purposeful. Evidently the dog had reminded him of an obligation to be dispatched before he could let himself anticipate a moment which already was bringing a tinge of color to his cheeks.

He crossed the station square without even glancing toward the Bay State veranda, thus adding to the manager's grievance. For Mr. Dodge, righteously resolved to favor him with a stony glare, was perforce robbed of the opportunity. The returned prodigal turned his head just once, to smile vaguely over his shoulder at the newsboy who had recovered from his stare in time to cry shrilly, "Ya-a-ay, Jimmy! 'N'd'yuh git in?" Favoring the shady side of the street, preceded by the dog that looked back every few feet to see if he was following, he started up Front Street. Mr. Dodge waited, gazing anathema at the thin and shiny back, became convinced that his guest was not to do the sight justice, and set himself to the task.

"T. Elihu's black sheep of a nephew." He sighed

profoundly. "I suppose there is a skeleton in every family cupboard, but it doesn't seem so bad when you can keep it under lock and key. Just look at the shine of those breeches, will you, and the fringe at the heels. And those shoes. A nice Sunday get-up, isn't it?"

Once more the drummer's round face had become less cherubic, but his voice was softer and more disarming than before.

"Preachers' salaries aren't the biggest in the world," he generously defended the absent man of cloth. "I suppose the dominie dresses his stepson as well as he can afford."

This was an unlooked-for reply, totally inharmonious and fundamentally stupid. Again Mr. Dodge's suspicion flickered; again the childlike blankness of the drummer's face reassured him.

"Dress him?" In every debate it was the manager's way to repeat his adversary's question, as infallibly as an interlocutor feeding lines to a minstrel end-man. "Dress him! He ought to be thankful that they don't lock the door in his face, and turn him away from their table."

"As bad as that," mused the traveling man. "Just what's he done—in particular?"

"Nothing." The speaker could not have mentioned murder with bitterer condemnation. "Nothing yet where they could get the goods on him. When they do they'll welcome him home with a pair

of handcuffs. He's never done anything. Didn't finish school because the teachers wouldn't let him study what he wanted to learn, instead of what they wanted to learn him. Never held a decent job—never did a stroke of real work in his life. Cutting ice in the winter on the lake, with a mob of loafers glad enough to pick up a dollar and a half a day, to spend on liquor to keep 'em warm, instead of an overcoat. Hanging around the livery stables in summer working on a furniture van, or driving a night-hack, carting God-knows-who, God-knows-where. You saw that yellow cur walk up and recognize him, didn't you?"

"Why, yes," the drummer's instant affirmative was almost enthusiastic. "Yes, I noticed the dog particularly. As good an Airedale as I ever looked at, from a distance, anyway. Seemed to know him—seemed to like him, too."

"Why wouldn't he?" demanded the manager triumphantly. "That was Pegleg Hanlon's dog. And Hanlon's is Jimmy Gordon's hang-out. They're the 'folks he runs with, the gang of crooks and yeggs who buy drinks for the Palace Theater girls who live there. *They'll* all be glad to see him back, don't worry. Though why they should be is beyond me. I'll bet two to one that he hasn't a red cent in his pockets."

Ordinarily the drummer would have closed immediately, if for no other reason than because the odds

were attractive. And though he let the opportunity slip, it was a rash offer on Mr. Dodge's part, as Jimmy Gordon's immediate movements proved.

Three blocks down the street the latter entered Harry Tracy's corner cigar store, invested a coin in a package of cigarettes to be recommended not for blend or favor, but for their cheapness (twenty for a nickel) and reappeared, smoking, just when the Airedale was retracing his steps regretfully, to look into this dereliction.

Four months previous Jimmy Gordon had left Warchester (a fast freight almost jerked an arm from a socket on that occasion, when he misjudged its speed in the darkness) with a greasy two dollar bill, a half dollar and a nickel in his possession. The bill was still with him, tucked away in a vest pocket, a fund to be drawn upon only in the last extremity; the half dollar had proved to be a disappointing sham; and the nickel, not the same one but good coin of the realm acquired elsewhere and brought back to be squandered upon home trade (one of T. Elihu's admonishments), rounded out the total—a record to be envied by any tourist returning home after many weeks in strange scenes.

This show of solvency failed however to disconcert Mr. Dodge. Instead he laughed suddenly as though the sight of the cigarette had recalled a particularly good joke until then overlooked.

"Yeggs and crooks and chorus women—and I heard only last week the reason *he* gave for associatin' with them. He said some day he was going to write; said he was going to put people like Hanlon's crowd into a story, so that people would understand 'em better, and blame 'em less! Can you beat that? And who do you suppose he said it to? To T. Elihu! He was bracin' T. Elihu for a job on the *Gazette*, I hear. And T. Elihu—" the exquisite humor which that interview must have afforded rendered Mr. Dodge almost inarticulate—"T. Elihu said he had a police court reporter already, to cover that sort of story. Goin' to be an author! And him old enough next year to vote—and a top price he'll get for it, too, don't doubt that. I wish I could have been there and seen T. Elihu's face. They say he just set behind his desk and pointed to the door and turned him out without openin' his lips. Watch now! You watch and see if he don't turn to the right. Hanlon's is back of the Palace Theater, three blocks down."

It proved to be a fair prophecy, though Jimmy Gordon wavered irresolute at the corner. Desire lay in another direction, but the mission which led to Hanlon's was in the nature of a trust. He wheeled, the Airedale gave a pleased skip or two, and Mr. Dodge's voice leaped with elation.

"What did I tell you!" he cried. "Now isn't that pretty hard on his folks? I tell you it isn't such a

long step from runnin' with thieves to burglary itself; nor such a long step from burglary to the chair. It's a good thing T. Elihu has a son of his own he can be proud of."

With that dark hint, capped by a benevolent conclusion, a sort of softness returned to Mr. Dodge's features. Jimmy Gordon's digression from the paths of hope could have had nothing to do with a look so unctuous. It must have sprung from a renewed appreciation of the "sermon" to be found in Sidney's welcome home. The Bay State manager had all but reached the open door when the drummer halted him. He was contemplating the Sunday issue of the *Gazette*, lying at his feet, open to the page which carried T. Elihu's few, eulogistic remarks.

"This Pegleg Hanlon's place?" the stranded one inquired softly. "Just what sort of a place is it?"

A roguish smile rose and marred Mr. Dodge's Sabbath expression—a smile most broad and meaningful. He winked.

"A joint," he said, "and one of the lowest in the town."

"But—but—" the drummer seemed to flounder. "But I thought that there weren't any such rotten spots in this fair and flowered community?"

Mr. Dodge had been expecting it all along. He should have known better than to lower his guard. This one was a "smart Aleck" like all the rest, only

a little cleverer in his insinuation. Angry blood surged into the Bay State manager's face.

"You did, eh?" Insult he contrived to convey for powers of observation so stunted. "You *thought* so! Well, I want to tell you that we've got as bad a red-light district in this town as any place twice its size in the east. After twelve o'clock it's no place for an—an amateur. I guess you haven't been very long in Warchester!"

Some fat men are capable of marvelously quick movement. The drummer was. He swung around in his chair so abruptly that Mr. Dodge fell back in some disorder. But the drummer remained seated. His voice held level. So did the eyes that rested upon the manager's face—altogether too level.

"No, I haven't," he drawled, "and I'm not staying an hour longer than I have to, either. Did I hear your telephone ring—or didn't I?"

Such white rage over a matter of geography was incomprehensible. Mr. Dodge had meant only to resent a slighting allusion to Warchester's complete cityhood.

"I—I guess you did," he accepted his cue mumbly. "Somebody must want to speak to me."

And he betook himself and a permanent hatred of commercial transients inside. For a moment following his departure the drummer sat breathing heavily. Then he broke into a smothered chuckle. Little by little placidity of a kind returned, and he

was communing with himself again, when the supper bell rang for the last time.

"Yup," he muttered as he rose, "the dog sure did like him. He sure did. But then, most dogs have pretty good sense, till they're taught different."

In the dining-room a waitress with fluffy hair and almond eyes caught his summoning nod. She approached with a toss of her head, for she was known as a favorite with the "trade." But the words he spoke into the ear she held too close to his face wrought a complete change in the simper upon her lips.

"I see Jimmy Gordon's got back," the drummer said chattily. "Know him, do you?"

The girl's challenge changed to furtiveness. She wet her lips with a nervous tongue and looked to see if anyone had heard, who might carry the question to Mr. Dodge's ears.

"I—I—" she stammered, and there the drummer spared her.

"All right. I get you," he broke in. "Bring me some coffee, will you, Little One? I like it warm, at least—and I can drink it hot if I have to."

The girl hesitated. These words were of a language she understood, but the tone employed baffled her none too quick brain. She would have thought it kindly and respectful, only such a possibility was out of the question. Furtiveness still

marred her cheap prettiness as she started for the kitchen.

The next day the drummer stopped for one last look up Front Street, before he boarded his train. The thoroughfare was alive with traffic, but the gunner and his mate in the center of the Common would not be overlooked. A pitying smile edged the departing traveling-man's lips as he gazed upon them. He addressed his farewell words to the intrepid pair.

"You poor boobs, you," he broke scathingly into the vernacular; "you poor boobs! Take a look over your shoulders once in a while. Don't you know that when they get you in this town, they'll do it from behind?"

CHAPTER III

SPEAKING OF DOGS

CERTAIN now that his destination and Jimmy Gordon's was a common one, the Airedale abandoned all anxiety on that score.

Main Street was less deserted than the thoroughfare down which they had come. To the right in front of Hicks' drug store a dark green suburban car stood on a switch; on curb and sidewalk straggling knots of passengers were waiting to transfer to another which made connection at this point for another district. And although the great man himself had passed from sight, accompanied by the Reverend Watson Duncan, those "transfers" who were on terms of familiarity with the glittering equipage were indicating where it stood before the *Gazette* offices, for the benefit of fellow-passengers less blessed, a touch of patronage kindly, though a bit astonished at ignorance so provincial, coloring this Samaritan service.

Naturally the attention which the kindred wayfarers attracted was negligible in the extreme. Disaster has a cynical habit of edging into a scene in just such a casual fashion. Their appearance was marked by no one except Sidney Banks, lolling

back upon the plum upholstery, and one Abel Thompson, citizen of color, seated upon the low step of the Palace Theater lobby, directly across the way. Sidney, apprised of the Airedale's approach by a sudden tug upon the white bull-terrier's leash, was too immediately taken with inspiration to have eyes for the one who followed after. And Abel's recognition of dog and human, while complete, was entirely subconscious. Mr. Thompson's was a semi-hypnotic state, brought about partly by idolatrous consideration of that tan top-coat and checkered suit, partly by envious reconstruction of a choice bit of gossip which had heralded the wearer's return to Warchester.

Persistent rumor had it that a possible hasty alliance with a lady of the footlights who worried her head not at all over engagements theatrical was responsible for T. Elihu's concern for the health of his only son. People of high degree and low had been chuckling over it for days—chuckling as if it was a good joke upon T. Elihu (a great joker himself!) and an amusing escapade not at all to be condemned, though to be mentioned and enjoyed discreetly, of course. This was Mr. Thompson's view of the affair. He was rolling the piquant morsel upon his tongue and regretting the perhaps too impetuous purchase of a delicate green creation striped with purple which he was wearing, when the first hint of trouble to come compelled him to

relegate both thoughts temporarily to the background.

The Airedale outstripped Jimmy Gordon. He came up at a trot, pausing in the head of the alley which, piled high with discarded scenery and less recognizable junk, ran past the Palace stage-door to the entrance of Hanlon's hotel in the rear, to give the gentleman of color, also a friend of his, a wag or two and a measuring glance. By his own description Abel Thompson was an assistant stage-manager of the theater; by force of circumstance, property-boy and raiser-back and the good-natured butt of all abuse which had no other safe outlet. And as he was often called upon to exercise his talents as night chef in Hanlon's, between seasons as picket at the stage-door, from the Airedale's point of view he was a personage particularly worthy of cultivation. Abel was reaching out a reciprocating hand when he noted, with a distinct shock, that the bull-terrier no longer occupied a space on the seat beside his master.

A moment earlier Mr. Thompson could have sworn with a clear conscience, that a leash held the madly straining white animal in check—a mistake, however, on the face of it, for the terrier was already down upon the pavement, his whimper a low muttering, his intent anything but obscure. Instantly Mr. Thompson drew back his hand, so quickly that one might have thought he was establishing an alibi, come what might. And his lazy

click of invitation became a command made stern by necessity.

"Go 'long, you yalla dawg!" he ordered crisply. "Go 'long 'bout yuh own affairs, Oh Boy."

But the Airedale only blinked back at him, singularly out of sympathy with such incipient panic. He failed to change his position in the slightest degree, except that he turned his head slightly, to survey the terrier with a look neither prolonged nor inimical. And yet the anxiety which this serenity promptly provoked indicated that Mr. Thompson was familiar with the symptom. He raised a troubled face toward the barouche, opened his mouth, and became instantly uncertain how to proceed.

There were certain liberties which white folks tolerated; certain impertinences which seemed to amuse and even flatter them. Interference, on the other hand, with their preconceived notions invariably made them peevish—a barely believable phase of the present situation. Sidney Banks was occupied with the Sunday paper—most elaborately occupied in fact. But had he been put to it, again Mr. Thompson could have sworn, conscience clear, that a faint s-s-s-s-s was arising from the general direction of the barouche. Stifling the well-meant impulse, he rolled his eyes in delighted anticipation, until the whites shone like china marbles. He swung from the stiff-legged advance of the white terrier to glimpse the

Airedale, back still turned and deep in thought, and suffered a reaction. It was a sacrifice, especially in the face of that suspected s-s-s, but Mr. Thompson did his duty as he saw it.

"Bet' call yuh dawg, Mist' Banks," he lifted his voice apologetically. "Bet' call yuh dawg!"

Mr. Banks raised his head, looking in several wrong directions before his gaze found the point from which this suggestion had come. Thereupon he smiled with careless lack of comprehension, and turned a page of his paper. Presently the s-s-s-s rose a little louder, and urged by it and morally fortified, the terrier stepped more jerkily, the mutter a swelling menace in his throat. He closed the last few feet which separated him from his chosen prey with a whirlwind rush. But the threatened annihilation was momentarily delayed.

Without excessive effort the Airedale side-stepped and avoided the flashing teeth and wide pink jaws. Half facing away from the terrier, whose rush had shot him across the sidewalk, he turned questioning eyes upon the face of Mr. Abel Thompson. The latter's concern deepened to dismay. This also was a symptom.

"Bet' call yuh dawg, Mist' Banks," he repeated, and dared plead urgency now. "Bet' call him off. He go' git'nto trouble, 'f'yuh don'."

The warning was heartfelt and sincere, but it came too late. Sidney Banks lifted vexed features, but he

had no time in which to register protest against the uninvited freedom of address in which the gentleman of color was indulging himself. At that instant the bull-terrier decided that this antagonist was too cowardly, too utterly craven, for the employment of caution. If he wouldn't turn and fight, it were best to mete out speedy destruction and have done with it. He tore in again. Again, his gaze harassed now, the Airedale shifted and came clear. And then a dusty, blue-serge clad figure threw a shadow across Mr. Thompson's paling face.

"Take care of yourself, Oh Boy," a still voice said.

Jimmy Gordon, covering ground more slowly, had come up with his friend. He was leaning against a brick corner of the alley. And though the words were barely audible, gravely unimpassioned and so entirely detached that it would have been hard to say who had spoken them, the Airedale beseeched Mr. Thompson no longer.

He faced the terrier. He dropped his head until the lean muzzle barely cleared the ground. And when the bull, whining his approval of this final stand, circled and bunched his splendid muscles, calm as a trained boxer he side-stepped once more. But no lull followed this maneuver. Action fairly blurred that section of the sidewalk before the Palace Theater. Riot rose and rent the Sabbath hush.

'At the terrier's first pained yelp the throng of

"transfers" surged southward. Before they had crossed the street the soda clerk from Hicks' and the car crew were pelting at their heels. One and all, as they ranged up, breathless but joyous, they were certain only as to the number of white dogs involved. The number of yellow ones baffled calculation.

For the Airedale moved too rapidly to be followed with the eye. He fought soundlessly as well, the terrier for a time making noise enough for both. Yet even Sidney Banks, standing up in the barouche across the street, the better to watch the combat all but obscured from him, did not realize how swift and deadly was his work. But when a particularly high and piercing howl ended abruptly in an ominous, bubbly gurgle, Jimmy Gordon, the only aloof and unmoved spectator, was constrained to act.

He broke through the throng and fell to his knee beside the writhing bodies. It was time enough, for the terrier's gasps were wheezelike, his throat stained crimson. Dashing up in Jimmy Gordon's wake, the confident smile wiped from his lips, Sidney arrived just as the yellow dog's jaws were relaxing beneath the thin fingers' pressure. Livid at the sight of the prostrate victim which the Airedale relinquished with reluctance, Sidney set himself and raised his heavy stick. It fell, and rose and fell again. The first blow struck full across the Airedale's quiet head; the second laid the knuckles of one of Jimmy Gordon's hands open to the bone.

Staggering the yellow dog drew away toward the mouth of the alley that led to Hanlon's. Dazed he was unable to dodge, and one of Sidney's boots raised and carried him much of the distance. He lay for a moment where he fell, breathing sobbingly, before he tottered on. Sidney had the bull-terrier in his arms when Jimmy Gordon straightened. He, too, like the Airedale, swayed a little. He looked at his hand—looked up and smiled deprecatingly.

"Hello, Sid, how are you?" he said. "Gee, look at that! You cut my hand clean to the bone."

There was no resentment in the attention he called to his wound. It was simply a part of his wholly mild and curiously impersonal greeting. For answer Sidney shouldered him to one side. And the crowd of enthusiasts, their ardor already dampened, were watching him carry the broken bull-terrier back to the barouche, when Abel Thompson, whose ecstasy had been spontaneous, chancing to roll his eyes aloft, delivered himself of a horrified snort.

"Glory to Moses," breathed that gentleman of color. "Glory to Moses—look dar!"

Having spoken he turned and ducked from sight. And when those who heard it obeyed his injunction, they too found immediate motion indispensable to comfort.

In a second story window of the *Gazette* building across the street loomed T. Elihu Banks, his great

bulk not quite filling the aperture, his purple face appalling. Very plainly he, too, had been witness of the encounter; his attitude toward such sacrilege was alarmingly evident. At the first stiff gesture which he flung at it the rabble dispersed—that is, all but the thin and tired figure in shiny blue serge. And in the latter's remaining upon the stricken field there should be read nothing heroic. He was too wholly intent upon his hurt hand to see anything else for a moment or two, though to the Jovian figure his conduct savored of defiance no doubt. Jimmy Gordon stood all alone when he finally raised his head.

A less preoccupied person would have flinched, if only involuntarily, before that blasting wrath, flanked by the pallid rage of the Reverend Watson Duncan and the sheer distaste of Mr. J. J. Latham. Jimmy merely blinked—a rascally clever simulation of surprise! Next he smiled, and the slightly crooked grin rendered misconstruction in the other quarter impossible. He even dared brazenly to nod his head in greeting, and though the window was closed and the distance considerable, Jimmy heard T. Elihu roar. The words which the town's great man addressed to the man of cloth were indistinguishable; their probable gist gave the boy little trouble to guess. Near the stage-door he met Mr. Thompson returning to see what had happened. This mercurial one had recovered entirely from his

brief glimpse of T. Elihu's face, and craved another.

"Din I tole 'at young man he bet' call his dawg?" he chuckled in anything but a chastened voice. "Din I tole him twice? What business a white bull-pup got mixin' with Oh Boy? He's some warrior, 'at dawg—some warrior!"

Jimmy nodded his thorough accord with this sentiment, but he seemed little inclined to talk. As he lifted a hand to brush damp hair back from his forehead blood dripped to the pavement. The negro's eyes rolled heavenward.

"Lookit 'at hand!!" he whispered. "Pow! Din he lam you? Bet' come in an' lemme wrop it up."

His eyes again apologetic the black sheep wheeled up the alley. There was no indecision in his movement, no thought of coming at his destination by a less observed route entered his head. But the weight of three pairs of eyes was heavy upon his back, the presence of one observer a fact to be regretted in the extreme. Devoutly Jimmy Gordon wished that J. J. Latham might have been elsewhere at that instant.

CHAPTER IV

THE GIRL CALLED MELODY

HANLON'S Hotel, a four-square structure of red brick better known as Pegleg's Place, stood in a hollow square formed by three built-up sides of the city block and "the river." The outlook, therefore, which guests of this doubtful hostelry enjoyed was scarcely one to be recommended with pride, though as a matter of record Hanlon's patrons were little given to a consideration of the unsavory litter surrounding the back doors of these edifices of better repute, or the stream of water, iridescent with oil and acid, which edged the hotel "park," a court of crumpled cement, innocent of tree or other living, green thing, and aquiver with August heat.

In fact, whenever one of his patrons began to frequent too persistently the rusted iron benches with which this latter expanse was dotted, brooding too openly over the sluggish current, Hanlon, watching without seeming to watch, invariably found an excuse to suggest a change of scene. Conduct unbecoming a gentleman or a lady, evinced by a desire to swing a chair or scream epithets in a tone which might penetrate the alley to Main Street, served as often as any; general arrears in bar and

board not at all. For those who lived in Hanlon's were of a peculiar sensitiveness in some matters, of a peculiar punctility as well—a trait which would have surprised an outside world had it become general knowledge. Guests paid when they could, and almost never failed to pay. No caste was lost simply because of a temporary difference of opinion, backed up orally or physically, as the case might be. So, by watchful tact, Hanlon spared their feelings and saved his house unduly gruesome publicity at the same time. And for the rest, interior and exterior, the hotel itself was spotless, even about its back door.

The front office through which Jimmy Gordon made his entrance from the alley was deserted at that hour. Business was always light in Hanlon's between midday and nightfall, the stretch from midnight till daybreak witnessing the liveliest demonstrations. And a larger rear room, doubly light by contrast with the long and dingy passageway by which it was reached, ostensibly open to anyone, at any time, by its very accessibility, manifested but slighter show of trade.

A single couple leaned over one of the small round tables with which a scant dance space was banked; a lone waiter with a white patch of apron across his thighs leaned against a window-sill, back to his charges. And the couple, a fox-faced youth and a girl with a white plumed hat, seemed oppressed by

the weather; the waiter indifferent to the point of stupidity. Hope of diversion, no matter how trivial, showed in the faces of all three as they turned at the sound of an opening door. But with the entrance of Jimmy, followed by the gentleman of color who, habitually sensation-hungry himself, was loath to leave that injured hand in the absence of better divertisement, all similarity of expression ended.

The waiter, of a deceptively flabby expansiveness, continued outwardly indifferent, though his air of stupidity left him. His eyes went directly to the frayed and bleeding knuckles; he appraised them instantaneously, calculating the extent of the injury and the probable finality, for the time being at least, of the affair which had occasioned the damage. Such was the waiter's system. And his incipient suspicion had become actual indifference behind his mask of apathy, before he raised his eyes and recognizing the owner of the knuckles, knew beyond doubt that no conflict upon the premises threatened. Neither surprise nor curiosity at the return of one whose absence had been more than once remarked during the last few months crossed his heavy face. He intruded no greeting since the prodigal was quite evidently occupied with thoughts of his own. The window-sill creaked under massive elbows again. Again the waiter seemed stupid.

The other man's appraisal of the newcomer was

brief, more in detail, and the unflattering conclusions arrived at not too scrupulously concealed by half. Arrogant display of his opinions was a characteristic of this personage—one Whitney Garrity, a lightweight of parts and a cosmopolitan scholar by his own description; William Garrity, alias Alibi to the police by reason of his adroit manipulation of coincidence, and a menace to the established order of things by birth.

Whitey's eyes, too, touched first upon the crimsoned hand and the supercilious smile of a professional for the crude work of one less versed in the craft twisted his features. They flitted from run-over shoes to the mildly apologetic face above dusty blue serge, and the smile became a pitying sneer. Whitey wore a two-carat stone in his red four-in-hand; he sported another, smaller but not so yellow, upon a white and femininely tapered finger. And his was a self-centered nature, else he would have sensed all that lay behind the waiter's silence and noticed as well the change which altered the face of his companion, the girl who sat with him at the opposite side of the table.

There was nothing complex about the expression which swept her face. A moment before she might have been called pretty, had it not been for the defiant curl of her lips which more than belied a sort of childish plea for kindness in her eyes. And now quite suddenly she was pretty in spite of it—in spite

of her atrocity of a hat the white plume of which flopped forward as she nodded with an impulsiveness both eager and uncertain. Even Whitey became aware of her quickened loveliness. He wheeled in time to see Jimmy return the nod with what might have been construed as tender self-consciousness, in any place but Hanlon's.

It was confusion which made Jimmy's bow awkward, combined with a startled, guilty certainty that there must be something behind so colorful a smile which he should at least remember. As it was he recognized in her just one of the Palace Theater girls, known to the habitu   of the hotel as Melody. She had never offered another name, and beyond that the boy's recollection was an embarrassing blank. But Whitey's gaze which followed him the length of the room waxed vicious. It dwelt upon him after he had dropped into a chair and surrendered his hand to Abel Thompson's ardent ministrations.

The girl called Melody should have known better. Disaster before now had taught her the inadvisability of divided interest during business hours and earned her the reputation of a trouble-maker. Yet she, too, continued to gaze with warm and yearning softness until Whitey could no longer contain his displeasure.

"Why'n't you invite him over?" he growled. "He looks like he might be a free-spendin' gent with a bank-roll."

The remark was thoroughly in tune with many which had lately caused the girl to wonder whether Whitey was worth the while even taking into consideration the yellow stones. In any walk of life self-sufficiency is bound to grow irksome sooner or later and gossip at Hanlon's was beginning to accuse Mr. Garrity of a parsimony anything but promising, his tales of magnificent improvidence notwithstanding.

"Why, that's only Jimmy Gordon," she stooped to explanation partly because memory had softened her spirit as well as her lips, partly because it was her choice to be amiable. "He's been away quite a while. I—I didn't know he'd got back."

"Ain't been writin' you regular, then?" Whitey's response had the patness of a litany. "Maybe he's decided that you don't figure any more in his young life."

Usually this betrayal of a possible jealousy would have been turned to advantage without the loss of a moment or a syllable. Instead the girl bowed her head lower, as if against verbal intrusion, and remained momentarily silent. When she did speak it was with dreary gentleness showing in her voice.

"Seems to me I hear somebody say you was a wise guy," she might have been musing aloud, "or maybe I just overheard you talking about yourself. Can't you see that he don't belong here—or do you need a woman to tell it to you?"

That was her second mistake, if it was conciliation she desired. This time Jimmy, chancing to meet the look which Whitey flung that way, stirred a little and blinked his surprise. He would have believed that the insolence in it was personal, had he not been sure that the fox-faced person was a total stranger, and logically disinterested in him, unpleasantly or otherwise. Abel Thompson mistook the start and the blink as indications of pain and tempered somewhat his zeal.

"So-o-o," said Whitey. "Then he's a nice little boy! Not our sort at all?"

With far less effort than that by which it had achieved gentleness the girl's face hardened. Even her voice changed and grew nasal.

"Our sort!" Matchless scorn made Whitey's sarcasm seem amateurish. "Our sort? You're dead right he ain't. He's so different that he treated me once as if I was a lady, without even stopping to wonder whether I was or not." She paused and decided to speak further. "Once I got into the wrong church, but the right pew—a church where there was only ladies and gentlemen present, until I horned in. Can you beat that for a dippy stunt—*me* walking into a church and helping myself to a seat just as independent as if it was a lecture or something where you only had to buy a ticket to get by? You're right you can't. I guess it was the singing I wanted to hear. I never was strong for sermons, and I sung in a choir

once myself. So in I sailed, and I wasn't wearing a lid like the one I got on, either, but I played in luck just the same. I drew a place next to him; since then I've remembered that there was plenty of room in his neighborhood, so maybe the usher seen to that, too. Anyway, he opened a hymn-book and let me hang on to one cover of it, just when I was going down for the last time. We stood up together and sung, him the tenor and me the air—sung 'Nearer My God To Thee,' while the rest of the congregation tried to figure whether it would be better to call the police or wait and disinfect the building later. . . . Laugh, damn you, laugh! Do you think I'm tellin' you this because I think *you* would understand. Why, I ain't sure you would know what a church is. I'm telling it because I've never told it before, never spoke of it, and I wanted to hear how funny it would sound—to myself."

Whitey controlled his mirth and attempted to interrupt, but she cut him short with a dangerous fury.

"According to my count, you've blown me to one glass of beer this afternoon. The sandwich don't enter; it's been served steady, every Sunday, for a month. That's regal, and a poor girl ain't got any money. He lends all he can spare to them he knows can't ever pay it back. So now, if you have to knock, go ahead and knock. I ain't been particular for a long while about what I listen to. But pick somebody

besides Jimmy Gordon or you'll be doin' a solitary—or wake up wondering what fell on you. This ain't 'gay Paree' nor 'Good old Chi' nor 'little old N'Yawk.' This is Hanlon's—and Hanlon's is the only place in Warchester where folks can't knock that kid! Lay off! Do I make myself sufficiently clear?"

Apparently she did. Whitey tried to cover his white rage with a laugh, but the effort was a little strained and uncomfortable. Further, he kept a cautious eye upon the beer mug which she was fingering nervously.

"Gee, ain't she the little spitfire," he sought facetiously to relieve the tension. "How'd I know he was a particular friend of yours?"

"He ain't," Melody flashed back at him. "This minute if you was to ask him quick for my name he couldn't give it to you. Didn't you get that from the way he pinked up when I bowed to him. He ain't my friend. I—I'm a friend of his." She faltered and her fierceness was gone of a sudden. She swallowed with some difficulty and coughed a little. "It's hot in here," she finished unsteadily. "Come on. I gotta get out in the air."

And because she spoke no more on that topic Whitey thought that the final shaft of hatred which he launched at the one she had championed so bitterly had escaped her notice. It pleased him to anticipate another meeting at no distant date. The affront which he had suffered at Jimmy Gordon's hands was

nameless but nonetheless unforgivable. It demanded expiation. After the door had closed behind this new enemy which he had acquired unwittingly, Jimmy broached the business which had brought him there.

"Hanlon home?" he asked.

The Palace theater factotum and substitute chef shook his head.

"He ain't been 'roun' sence mawnin'," he replied. "We been havin' mo' or less trouble eveh sence you left, and las' Wednesday it done reached a crisis. 'Twant much—jes' a little argymint ovah too many aces in a poker deck—on'y some folks is nachelly got to go out an' talk." He rolled his eyes scornfully at the door through which Whitey had just made his exit. "Repo'tah got hole of it and make a big story outen it—two men dying and another cripple' foh life, when it ain't nuthin' mo' than a couple haids busted fum gettin' in the way of a table laig. But 'lection's comin' on again, an' folks up on the hill is talkin' refohm again, so Pegleg, he out rangin' things up an' pacifyin' the proletariat. Some folks want to watch out who they tell what about. Goin' git into trouble 'f they don'."

The allusion was scarcely veiled, but Jimmy ignored it. He reached into a pocket and brought out a roll of bills, small of denomination, and limp and very dirty.

"Give this to Hanlon when he gets back, will you?" he requested. "I guess I'm too tired to wait,

and he's likely to be late, anyway. Just tell him I ran into Dempsey last week. Tell him Dempsey thanks him for the loan. He caught a fruiter for Brazil."

The negro tucked the bills into a pocket of his vivid waistcoat without examination or comment concerning the one from whom they had come. It was ancient history that Dempsey had left town a little hastily, not so many weeks before, because he had been so long law-abiding that the police, in exasperation, had finally arranged a misdemeanor for him. Abel gave more attention to the boy's statement that he was tired. It was seldom that Jimmy Gordon spoke concerning himself. He tied a last knot in a none too white handkerchief and patted the improvised bandage.

"Dar now," he said. "Dar! She's all clean and 'spectable. You—you lookin' mighty bluish 'roun' yo' mouf. Shall I get you sumpin' to drink?"

"I guess I'd better be getting along home," he said.

The gentleman of color remained seated after the door had opened and closed once more. He wrestled for a while with a knotty problem and finally had to give it up.

"That's a funny boy," he audibly admitted defeat. "Never disclose to nobody what he' thinkin' at all. 'F I din' know where he was goin' I'd say he was glad to go."

CHAPTER V

COME YE WHO ARE WEARY

TWO phrases, eloquent of an old-fashioned decade, had survived Warchester's growth to cityhood; and while one of them had lost, more or less, its geographical exactitude, the other, from year to year, continued to increase in social significance. "Down town," at its elastic best, could no longer be said to embrace the city's vast and soot-soiled area of industry quite as faithfully as it had once covered a compact block or two of marts devoted to barter and trade. But "up on the hill" was still the "exclusive" residential section of the community, though the town's growth, commented upon in public as phenomenal, had not respected wholly even this abode of the "best people."

In private this insidious encroachment was deplored, principally by those families whose white and green colonial homes dated back to that earlier era—but only in private. For the male heads of those same families, retired from actual participation, since the inroad of competitive commercialism, were growing more and more disposed to accept, ready-made, the doctrines of their more active

neighbors, as unreservedly as they intrusted to them their dividend-paying investments.

If T. Elihu Banks, President of the Commonwealth Trust, openly exulted in expansion and blessed it in the name of prosperity, it would have argued a deplorable lack of ordinary common sense not to have shared his enthusiasms and very positive prejudices as well.

Ever since he could remember Jimmy Gordon's step had always begun to lag whenever he turned into Maple Street and faced the incline which led into this quarter of short lawns and shade trees and discreet silences, not so much from a reluctance to be identified with its dignified traditions as because it had long been plain that he was a dweller there largely through sufferance. It was this realization which lay behind the perpetual question in his eyes, and his air of mild apology. Whenever it was feasible he took a different way home, one more circuitous but less in the nature of a trespass.

And yet, that afternoon, his step quickened, once he had left behind him the last of the shops which had insinuated themselves around the corner from Main Street. He walked with his lean face thrust forward, the difficulties of this more direct route temporarily forgotten. For several years he had been living, in spirit, a totally different reappearance in this charmed section. Three months before, when he had left Warchester with a laboriously typed

manuscript buttoned inside his coat, he had pictured himself returning costumed after a fashion not quite as compelling as his cousin Sidney's, yet nevertheless no longer calculated to offend a fastidious neighborhood.

This triumph of letters had suffered a serious setback, but there was no bitterness in the boy's heart because it had proved a false hope. He had experienced too many disappointments of one sort or another, not to have acquired a certain dogged philosophy.

So he hurried and took little note of the stir which kept pace with him on both sides of the street. Once he looked at his watch, a cheap affair not to be trusted in an emergency, and forgot to regret the dust upon his clothing. Custom was still a fixed and dependable matter in Warchester. At that moment, if the watch was correct, he knew that Evelyn Latham was holding court upon the Latham front veranda, surrounded by feminine and masculine members of what was religiously referred to, of late, in the *Gazette* society column, as the city's younger set.

Jimmy was not a member of this circle; with the literary triumph in mind, now indefinitely postponed but far from abandoned, he had never gone so far as to dwell upon a day when it should open to receive him. Yet he, too, had been paying homage for a long time, content to worship, even from afar,

strangely untroubled by jealousy for those who were luckier and could sit at her very feet.

If it is true that distance lends enchantment, there was ground enough for his devotion. He had never spoken a word to her in his life. But he had bared his head to her twice as she drove past in her electric and nodded to him—nodded unmistakably. And both occasions, double assurance that she was aware of his existence, had left him for a time in such a state that he was incapable of wondering whether recognition was due to the character of his reputation, or in spite of it.

In front of St. Luke's church, one block south of the Latham home, he stopped for the first time since he had left Hanlon's alley behind him, though his quickened breath was not the result of the rapid ascent. He wanted to enjoy anticipation to the full, and instead the undesirable luster of portions of his raiment promptly intruded itself. Gravely then he pondered the advisability of crossing the street, a move which would carry him past the doors of T. Elihu's great brick pile of a house and necessitate a direct recrossing, or of continuing straight ahead; shaking his head a little over the lack of luster upon his shoes, he decided for the latter course.

The next instant he had started on again, and come again to a standstill. At first the gay dresses of the girls in the chairs on the veranda were only blurred patches of color in his eyes, the gallantry

upon the steps mere lumps of indeterminate gray. He blinked, but the blur was stubborn, until a fragment of laughter penetrated the roaring in his ears—laughter low and modulated and unmistakable. And then he saw clearly her face.

She was leaning forward, taunting Lloyd Jameson, Judge Jameson's son, leading him with amiable malice from clumsy flattery to clumsier amplification. Even without the name of Latham she would have been hailed as a beauty. Strangers seeing her for the first time rarely failed to marvel at the vivid crimson of her mouth, against the smooth olive of her skin, before they asked who she was. The boy in front of the church was watching the glint of light upon her black hair, so arranged that it curled down and nestled tight against small ears, when a clock nearby struck the half-hour and all the rest happened—the self-same scene which had occupied his mind, hours before, while he “rode the blind,” the grind of the wheels an inferno in his ears, a storm of cinders biting his face.

A maid in crisp black and white came to the door and Evelyn Latham straightened and turned, her brows inquiringly lifted. The maid asked a question, and in reply she signed her pleasure with a bow ineffably brief and cool. And immediately thereafter a wicker service table made its appearance, laden with sandwiches and tiny cubes of cake with varicolored icings. The confusion incident to a closer

grouping; the treble of feminine chatter; Lloyd Jameson's dangerous alacrity to serve a sex helpless at a certain age—every detail was poignantly familiar to the motionless figure who stood looking on.

Countless Sunday afternoons, in his room in the Reverend Watson Duncan's white cottage which overlooked the Latham grounds, Jimmy Gordon had watched, proudly, the gracious informality of the hostess. Behind half-closed shutters he had ached with a hunger which pink frosted cakes never could have appeased, until, by the merciful grace of his own vivid imagination, he was enabled to rise and leave his physical self sitting there, while he sauntered across the lawn and, after a gay and inconsequential word or two of greeting, catching the slight yet beckoning motion of her hand, went to take the place she had saved for him—a place next her own.

It would be difficult to say just how long he might have stood there on the sidewalk before St. Luke's, a shabby figure slightly stooped by fatigue, staring from perplexed and wistful eyes, before he recollected his position, or the sexton came out and performed that service for him. It is a mootless point as well, for just as he was about to play his part—the bodiless one in which he had grown letter-perfect—another actor, less hesitant and better costumed, simultaneously broke the spell, and carried it through for him, in the flesh.

Jimmy looked up to see Sidney come out of the red brick house, accompanied by his mother. She followed him to the top of the steps, where she stood, one hand lying upon his shoulder as if she was reluctant to let him go so soon. And Jimmy continued to look, his wistfulness gone, as Sidney ran down the steps and started across the street. Just before his cousin reached the Latham veranda, before the throng had fairly opened to envelop him, without stopping to reason why, the boy wheeled abruptly away.

But their voices reached him; he was so close that that was inevitable. And he knew that Evelyn Latham was smiling her calm, cool smile and stretching out a slim hand in greeting. Evidently the gossip which Abel Thompson had chucklingly offered as the true cause of Sidney's sudden return to Warchester had not spread as far as "up on the hill," or if it had, inexplicably it made little difference. Jimmy Gordon turned his back; he did not want to see. Real bitterness was his at that moment.

The chance which kept him from retracing his steps, to come at the white cottage by the longer, less brazen route, was trivial in the extreme. A black signboard stood in the middle of the church lawn, shaped like a conventional shield and lettered in gold. "Church of St. Luke—The Reverend Watson Duncan, Rector," the inscription read; "Services at 10.30 A. M. and 8 P. M." And underneath, in letters

not so large: "Come Ye Who Are Weary and Heavy Laden, and I Will Give You Rest."

Jimmy found himself staring at that board, and reading mechanically; and as he read, somehow he managed his slightly crooked smile again. His step had lost its briskness when he started on, but he did not cross the street to avoid passing the Latham veranda. And if his face was made hot by a girl's overloud question, it whitened the next instant as he overheard his cousin's reply. He had forgotten to carry his bandaged hand out of sight; going up the front steps of the cottage he stumbled blindly and barely kept from falling. When he recovered himself and reached for the door-knob he found the door already open before him. His mother stood upon the threshold waiting for him.

She was one of those heavy people whose languid air is less an indication of actual invalidism than a combination of pathetic resignation (assumed) to the will of the Lord, and a constant readiness to combat every argument which might challenge her fragility. Jimmy Gordon blinked at the suddenness of the encounter and stepped back a pace or two. Until that moment the boy had given no thought to this particular phase of his home-coming; he had neglected even to rehearse a politic and off-hand sentence or two, with which to break the news of his return, and for a breath he stood nonplussed. Then his manner became as professionally brisk and

reassuringly jaunty as that of the nerve-specialist who was in weekly attendance.

"Hello, mother," he said. "A bad penny! Here I am back home, you see."

It was often remarked how much Mrs. Watson Duncan, née Mathilda Banks, looked like her brother, T. Elihu, a bit of flattery that never missed fire. Now, as she moved doubtfully to one side and made room for Jimmy to enter, the resemblance was actual and astonishing. Her voice had been trained to its tired, colorless monotone.

"I see." She ignored her son's obvious witticism, and swept his dusty length with a single glance. "I saw you coming. Step inside—before the whole neighborhood gets sight of you."

CHAPTER VI

A CREATURE OF THE BURLESQUE

JIMMY'S room, that one which luckily overlooked the Latham grounds and the broad veranda, had not been opened since his departure. Of this an acrid odor of dust in the wave of hot and stagnant air which met him as he swung open the door was proof in itself; and an additional feathery accumulation upon the furniture gave it the desolate atmosphere of an apartment long closed against the expectation of occupancy.

Nothing had been changed or moved, and yet the boy hesitated upon the threshold, pondering a sense of strangeness which even his typewriter upon a plain board table, failed to lessen. And this ancient and decrepid machine was indeed an old, old friend. Acquired by the painfully exacting dollar-down and dollar-every-so-often route, its very failings had warmed him to it from the beginning; and once he had learned to humor its large disregard for accuracy in the matters of spacing and alignment, he had ventured to take it, little by little, into his confidence, until in the end it had become vested with a kindred personality which not only under-

stood but sympathized as well with his rather widely misunderstood aims and views.

It was his custom to bestow upon the keys an intimate pat or two, whenever he entered his room or left it—a sort of ritualistic salute—but now, after one glance, he avoided it studiously, just as he refused to meet squarely the dazed, bruised look in his own eyes, when he turned instead to the mirror of a scaly “dresser” and gave himself over to minute self-consideration.

For a time, from the dubious droop of his mouth, it might have been thought that he was finding something of amusement in the latter process. Then the expression underwent a change, for though the glass revealed only a portion of his person, this fractional revelation, finally accepted as a true reflection of his entire length, was sufficient cause for alarm. He shook his head, a bit ruefully, a little with regret, over the drepressing state of his one suit of clothes, but after he had removed the coat, brushed it mechanically with his hand and hung it over a chair-back with habitual care, abruptly all idea of an immediate cleansing of himself and his habiliments was abandoned. He wheeled, gropingly found the bed and stretched his thin length flat upon it.

Persistently, for a while, he kept his eyes closed; he feigned sleep, thinking to trick himself into slumber. But his muscles twitched from exhaustion;

excessive weariness kept him awake; and his brain, refusing to rest, raced like an engine released of its load. Unmindful of the heat at first, he blamed his wakefulness at length upon the closeness of the room. He rose and opened a window, only to find sleep as much an impossibility as before, though a tingling sensation, not unpleasant, crept over his body, while he drifted into a state of semiconsciousness filled with the roar of wheels.

And out of that roaring, as if from a great distance, there came to him a peal of laughter, low and cool and deliberately mocking. He lay with a smile hovering upon his lips, still hearing it after it had ceased, counting it only a dream-echo, until a continuous murmur, becoming distinct and real of a sudden, startled him half-upright. Waking at the ends of the earth Jimmy Gordon would have recognized that voice; without a thought of playing the eavesdropper, his chin propped upon one elbow, breathlessly he strained to listen.

"But, my dear boy," he heard Evelyn Latham protest, with the slightest suggestion of that blasé drawl which was alike the envy and despair of initiative girl friends—"my *dear* boy! You are too absurd even to suggest such a thing, now. I don't believe anything, or anybody, could persuade Lloyd to give up the part."

A landscape gardener had located a rustic bench in the shade of a stubby tree beyond Jimmy's window.

Here, now and again, the daughter of the house came to sit for a while, prettily busied with a pink-padded sewing-basket filled with a tangle of silks. Such hours the boy treasured, because he had been forced to share them with no one; but they were week-day occurrences without exception. From behind his closed shutters he had noted that the Sunday group upon the Latham veranda always showed an uneasy propensity to disintegrate into sets of two, once the wicker service-table was ravished.

He heard his cousin Sidney snort.

"Who in the world ever picked *him* for a leading man?" Sidney's request for information, while couched in the form of a question, aimed at the rhetorical, expressing as it did a supreme and sweeping contempt for the ability of Mr. Jameson, the gentleman under discussion. "Where did he ever get the idea he could act!"

Adroitly she skirted the edge of argument.

"Of course his bearing is hardly impressive or commanding." Jimmy heard Sidney hoot, but the rich voice, grown musing and judicial, refused to be disconcerted by this derisive interruption. "But—but as far as his acting goes—" Again she laughed, this time with sweet amusement—"Well, there is a scene or two in which I have been forced to ask him to restrain his passion for realism, at least in rehearsal. He takes it all very seriously."

In spite of a quick tightening of his throat Jimmy wished that he could see Sidney's face. The latter seemed to have no answer ready, but he was not allowed to remain long sulky or rebellious.

"If only you weren't so unreasonably stubborn, I know you could do more with him." Evelyn's voice indicated that she was leaning forward in one of her rare attitudes of appeal. "And then, there are so many other details in which you could set us right. We haven't anyone here in Warchester competent to coach us—that is, anybody upon whom we'd care to call—because we do want the performance to make its strongest appeal to a cultured audience. And everybody knows how familiar you are with the metropolitan stage."

Jimmy permitted himself the luxury of a grin, but Sidney's reply promptly straightened his lips. It became evident that he had put the wrong construction upon that last sentence, for Sidney's tone straightway grew mollified and thoroughly complacent.

"Of course I have had the opportunity to see how some of the big fellows do it," he admitted. "And, besides, it would be too late for me to—to get up in the part. But I warn you that we are a tyrannical lot. We have to see that the identity of the individual is completely submerged in the character to be—er—portrayed."

This may have been offered as an objection,

perhaps insurmountable, but it had a very different effect upon Evelyn.

"There!" said she. "That's exactly what I've tried to impress upon Lloyd! It's nothing less than providential that you've had to come home for a rest, though I'm afraid I'm not half as sympathetic as I should be, now that you've promised to take us in hand. You'll find us terribly amateurish—t e r r i- bly stiff. But you won't be too harsh with us at first, will you—too critical? I'm afraid I leave much to be desired myself, in my own rôle."

Jimmy did not need to see the look with which Sidney dismissed both entreaty and confession, in order to know what it was like. A certain softness in his answer painted it perfectly.

"You know I won't. The part for which you are cast is a little bit hazy in my mind just now—you mustn't let me forget to take a copy of the script home with me, so that I can brush up on it before to-morrow—but if I remember its essential characteristics correctly, it seems to me you are quite the type for it—quite the type! Beyond that it is entirely a matter of confidence—merely a question of true conception and interpretation."

"O dear! How dismayingly technical! But I *am* glad you're here, just the same." And her simulance of dismay promptly gave way to a silence so prolonged that the boy whose elbow was fast growing numb thought that they must have risen and moved

away. But she had merely paused to dwell upon another perplexity, for which she presently found words.

"There is another thing about which I have been uncertain," the cool voice said, absently. "I've been wondering—but I know you can advise me what to do. Don't you think that we should ask your cousin—Mr. Gordon, isn't it?—to help us, too?"

Jimmy's face went white as the pillow behind it. The incredible suggestion hit him like a blow in the dark. Blinking he swung himself erect until his feet touched the floor, brushing his eyes with the back of one hand, his odd, singularly bewildered gesture, to make sure that he was awake.

The first choking exclamation with which Sidney greeted the preposterous proposition was inaudible. Jimmy heard his second breathless "What!" And he marvelled then at the girl's naïve composure before a monosyllable so explosively eloquent.

"Then you don't think it necessary. I wasn't quite sure. It's a church charity, you know—and out of deference to Mr. Duncan——"

The explanation was left unfinished. Most ungallantly Sidney's loud laughter cut it short.

"Necessary! You haven't spoken to the Reverend Watson about it, have you?" he asked.

Miss Latham's reply was brief and chill. Sidney tried hard to master his mirth.

"Then don't, my dear," he chuckled. "Take the

advice of a member of the family and *don't!*"

"But he must be more or less familiar with the theater," the girl argued. "I—no one ever seems to mention the Palace Theater, without bringing his name up, in connection with it."

Suddenly the boy on the edge of the bed no longer strained to hear. His tensed body slackened perceptibly, and he had started for the window when Sidney's voice rose again, strong and stern, beneath it.

"The kind of knowledge he has of the theater shouldn't be mentioned in your presence, nor the Palace Theater bunch from which he acquired it. It was very fine of you to think of asking him. I understand thoroughly why you spoke of it, and I like to think you are like that—fine and gracious and kind. But in his case it's out of the question absolutely. I wouldn't permit it, even if the Reverend Watson did. And if the Governor found his name upon the program he'd ruin your perfectly good charity, right on the spot."

She accepted the ultimatum with pretty humility.

"Oh!" Her words were faintly shocked. "Oh! I didn't know—I only thought . . . Then he really is as wicked as people say he is?"

But Sidney scented a loss of that glamour with which, by vague allusion and vaguer protests of innocence, he had painstakingly surrounded himself,

in the last half hour or so. His manner turned patronizing.

"There is a difference between sheer vulgarity," he said profoundly, "and what you call—er—wickedness." He paused to sigh, self-deprecatingly. "I suppose I should be the last to cast a stone. Loneliness can drive a man to a lot of fool things, simply for the sake of diversion—things which he usually regrets afterward. And then, one has to keep up the pace in New York, you know, or drop out of the procession entirely. Poor old cousin Jimmy! He has stirred up a lot of unfavorable publicity, hasn't he? But, strictly *entre nous*, I think it's all a beautiful joke. Jimmy's inclinations doubtless are vicious, but he's too shiftless and lazy to be out-and-out bad. Usually, whenever I see him, which isn't often of course, he looks as if he was walking in his sleep."

Jimmy's face went from pale to scarlet. His eyelids stopped blinking and remained momentarily closed. And when they moved again and lifted, a stir upon the veranda of the red brick house across the street arrested his hand upon the window sash. His step-father made his appearance at that instant, followed closely by T. Elihu Banks himself. And both men stood for a moment at the head of the steps, pursuing a discussion in which, plainly, the smaller man had been playing the part of a deeply impressed and accordant listener.

T. Elihu seemed to be summing up, and expending

considerable emphasis in so doing, that there might be no excuse for later misconstruction or laxity. And the reverend gentleman looked a little pale. But when he ran down the steps and crossed the road with his customary briskness, a modish and dapper figure of which his parish had reason to be proud, there was nothing in his bearing to betray his inner turmoil.

Catching sight of the two young people on the rustic bench, he lifted a haughtily admonitory forefinger and shook it, all in his best ecclesiastical air. More than anything else he suggested a benevolent old rabbit, scuttling along home; but once he had left the stubby shade tree and the pair upon the bench behind him, his expression underwent an alteration violent indeed. The Reverend Watson Duncan's face became shockingly congested with rage.

Jimmy forgot to close the window. Presentient and pessimistic he crossed and opened the door of his room a crack. He heard the front door slam, and his step-father's pelting step and wheezing breath. Then there rose from the floor below an echo of T. Elihu's vehement discourse.

"I tell you, Madame, that this is the end!" Swayed as he was by the storm of fury which broke without one prefacing mutter, the Reverend Watson Duncan managed to preserve his perfectly rounded enunciation out of the wreckage of his self-control. "I have endured his sullen obstinacy, his vagabondage, his love of loose associates, with all the

Christian fortitude of which I am capable, because he is your son. But there is a limit at which even my forbearance must cease, and that limit has been reached to-day!"

A sofa creaked in the darkened front room downstairs. Mrs. Duncan was rising, with an indeterminate sound which might have been either a syllable of resignation or a word of self-pitying inquiry. The dapper little man, however, gave it slight heed. He had stopped for breath.

"Not content with instigating a dog-fight within one hour after his return, for the bestial amusement of himself and a gutter negro—not content with such Sabbath desecration! — he openly, flagrantly, defiantly turned his back upon me and the two gentlemen with whom I was at that moment discussing a campaign against this city's depravity, to swagger into the worst sink of iniquity in town. Openly, Madame, flagrantly! Do you hear me? *In broad daylight!*"

Again there arose the sigh, less indeterminate this time and sibilant, and flutteringly like a moan. Again Mr. Duncan ignored it.

"And so I warn you," he swept on, with an access of passion, "that my charity is exhausted. This is to be a righteous city. When men whose entire lives have been devoted to commerce are made to pause aghast at the boldness of immorality and crime, it means a social protest—an administrative upheaval

—which will lay bare every rotten spot to the sun. I have pleaded and I have prayed, for even an eleventh hour regeneration. Now it is too late. I have pledged myself to a righteous cause, and once I set my shoulder to the wheel I neither waken nor falter. My civic housecleaning shall begin at home!"

The crash of a shade flying up on a roller punctuated this climax. Delayed momentarily by the very volume of her husband's tirade, Mrs. Duncan's usual hysteria was overdue, when Jimmy stepped into the room. The reverend gentleman's faculties were so disordered that he had no immediate perception of his step-son's presence, but some sound of his coming had reached his mother, for she wheeled and showed a panic face as he laid a hand upon her arm. And out of tumult there came a silence, dreadful and dismayed upon the part of Mrs. Duncan.

The boy wet his lips with the tip of his tongue and smiled, mildly.

"You'd better go to your room, mother," he said, "before your headache grows worse."

For the infinitesimal part of a second she was incapable of motion. Then she turned and left the room, too astounded by a note of compassion in her son's voice and a kind of apologetic authority in his manner to wonder at the strangeness of her obedience. Jimmy followed her across the threshold. And the Reverend Watson Duncan was left standing

alone, with his mouth inelegantly open. He had hardly begun to recover from the shock when Jimmy reached the back door. From that point, however, his recovery was practically instantaneous. He leaped to follow; he tore open the door which the boy had closed quietly behind him. And his forefinger, playful no longer, shook jerkily at his stepson's back, already disappearing down a beaten path which led away through an orchard behind the house.

The little man was no longer dapper. His inner, mental state had wrought a visible, exterior dishevelment. And the sonorous accent, won by years of assiduous cultivation, went down before a burst of outraged pride.

"If you go now, to consort with that creature of the burlesque," he shrilled, "you go to stay! Do you hear me?"

The boy gave no sign that the threat had overtaken him, though such a contingency was unthinkable. Mr. Duncan's speech thereupon lost coherence, until it was no longer intelligible, but merely very, very loud.

Mrs. Duncan had delayed on the way to her room, and been drawn back, inevitably. Now she laid a restraining hand upon her husband's arm; and her remonstrance, while agitated, was anything but vociferous.

"S-s-s-h!" she admonished. "S-s-s-s-h, Watson! He

hears! Don't shout so! Do you want the whole neighborhood to hear, too?"

This had a marked effect upon Mr. Duncan. He swept the adjoining grounds with a startled look, straightened his garments with shaking fingers, and slipped noiselessly inside.

And Jimmy Gordon went steadily on, without a backward look. He had traversed the orchard, negotiated a crazy barbed-wire fence without damage to his blue serge, and crossed a decidedly discouraged garden plot before he was struck with the riddle in his step-father's speeding words.

"—That creature of the burlesque!" The meaning of the words was simple enough to get at; it was only their seeming lack of relevance which bothered. Jimmy stood repeating them aloud, trying to make of them a single piece with his present destination. And failing utterly, he was still frowning when he rounded the corner of a dingy house which fronted an unpaved, back street and stopped again, this time before an open door.

He had come perhaps three or four hundred yards (the difference in mean elevation was slight, but this locality was not, colloquially, "up on the hill.")

And here he stopped puzzling. Beyond the door, back toward him, stood a slender bronze-haired girl in a mad little costume of black, a slender figure which would have been unrecognizable, had it not been for the familiar tilt of her head. First of all

Jimmy recalled the conversation which he had overheard between Evelyn Latham and his cousin Sidney, but his brain, tired as it was, picked the flaw in such a deduction. Amateur theatricals, especially those planned for a cultured Warchester audience, were not likely to call for that black bodice which revealed the childish curve of shoulder and breast, not the puffy, fluffy skirt of black chiffon, ending above the knees, nor so frank a display of sheer black silk hose and tiny slippers. And the other possible explanation had no time in which to suggest itself.

The girl's head tilted to the other side as she spread the folds of the absurd skirt, preeningly, then nodded with manifest satisfaction; whereupon she laughed softly, hummed a measure as mad as the costume itself, and tripped a dainty step or two, with the grace of a wild thing.

This movement made room for the boy's reflection in the glass, and she encountered it there. She stiffened. Her eyes grew wide and shining. She stared at it, and turned and stared at him. Then she flew to him and flashed both arms about his neck.

"Jimmy!" she cried. "Jimmy! And I was afraid you mightn't get back until after I was gone! I was beginning to think you weren't coming back at all."

Assuredly there was a welcome here. The girl's immature body quivered her gladness, but the boy's face exhibited little emotion save vague curiosity and a certain distaste for the fuss she was making over

him. He unwound her arms and stood her away from him; she submitted to his scrutiny with a matter-of-fact desire for his approval untinged by self-consciousness; and at length he nodded his head. The costume spoke for itself.

"I thought for a moment—just for a moment—that they had asked you to take part," he said. "Then you're—going?"

It was an old, old question which needed no amplification to be clear. Blissfully the bronze-crowned head bobbed, her eyes searched his for something which they failed to find. Jimmy was too fundamentally honest to feign a sadness such as his cousin Sidney, in a like situation, would have managed instinctively; he was too frankly engrossed with his own thoughts to be glad, just because she was glad.

"I had to," she answered in a tone not nearly so brilliant. "I had to. It's better than waiting for a chance that might never come. Don't I look pretty?"

The boy entered the room heavily, crossed on lagging feet and dropped into a chair beside a red plush covered table. For a time he sat gazing vacantly before him, his chin in his hands, oblivious to the growing distress in the girl's eyes.

"Chorus?" he asked then, abstractedly.

She nodded. Her voice had become infinitely small and wistful.

"'The Satin Slipper.' We play here the beginning .

of next week—we're rehearsing now—and then a month or so on the road, and then into New York. You're glad, aren't you? Won't you *say* you are glad? Because I've never been so happy in all my life!"

But her tone belied the statement; her eager little face gave it the lie. And the next instant she had darted across the room and dropped to her knees, and buried her head in his lap.

"Jimmy!—Jimmy!" she sobbed. "Oh, I don't want to leave you here alone. Are you going to stay?"

The boy's face was very white beneath its stain of smoke and cinders. His attitude remained rigidly unchanged.

"I don't know," he answered vaguely.

"But you couldn't stand it here, alone," she repeated, with a gasp. "You couldn't stand it! Can't you—can't you come?"

"I don't know."

From the very dulness of his reiteration she realized that his reply was purely mechanical. She looked up, and finding his pallor haggard, all in a breath her own expression of woe was gone, hidden securely from eyes as bitterly blinded as his. With a little laugh, almost perfect in its simulated contentment, she was back upon her feet, dusting the knees of her stockings with one hand.

"I'm a pig!" she accused herself, candidly. "You're

tired; you're hungry—that's what's the matter with you. And I've still an hour almost, before I have to go; I'm going to get you something to eat. And you'd better wash your face, Jimmy. It's pretty smudgy—in spots."

CHAPTER VII

"NO MATTER WHAT YOU DO"

THE Warchester *Daily Gazette* (pithily termed the "town crier and criterion" in its own advertising matter) was not the only purveyor of divorce and disaster of which the city could not boast, though it fretted itself but little over the presence of a competitor in the field. Indeed, from Mr. Latham, the proprietor of the *Gazette*, and Wainwright, the city editor, who wore bone-rimmed spectacles upon a broad black ribbon and a look of large affairs, down to Charlie Rice, the pompadoured expert in the field of sports, whose fingers were yellowed with cigarettes, they were all not only exceedingly grateful for the other daily's opposition, but secretly solicitous as well concerning its well-known financial straits and uncertain future existence.

Every canvas needs its frame; and while, if put to it, doubtless every member of the *Gazette* staff would have admitted that the *Gazette* was a superior product of modern, up-to-the-minute journalistic methods worthy of comparison with any sheet in the country, it was still very satisfying to turn, now and then, to contrast it with the *Courier*.

Municipal Warchester had ceased some time

before to boast of the latter paper as an institution, but the *Gazette* never failed to treat it as a dignified and capable antagonist—an attitude not so harsh and far more beneficial, so far as the *Gazette* was concerned. Many of Wainwright's most brilliant paragraphs were tossed off after a pleasant half-hour spent in perusing an editorial composed in the camp of the enemy; he was fondest of all of heading his own column with a reference to "the opinion of our esteemed and scholarly contemporary, Mr. Landis, who once more attempts to attack a vital, twentieth century problem with a lamentably impractical, mid-Victorian pen."

Oddly enough, repeated use of this word scholarly had in the end won for the *Gazette* city editor himself a reputation for sober erudition entirely untempered by ridicule. Hence the broad black ribbon and the bone-rimmed spectacles. But (odder by far) no one had ever stopped to think that the appellation, or accusation, was actually accurate in the case of David Landis. It had been left to the man on the street to pass final judgment upon the *Courier's* excellence or lack of it, and this had been done and was being done in no definite fashion. The news-stand trade refused to purchase the *Courier*, except in an extremity, and then only with an aggrieved complaint, because it had not yet succumbed to bankruptcy.

Some wag had dubbed it "T. Elihu's crown of

thorns," and the witticism was apt, at that. For the *Courier's* attacks upon the town's great man, punctilious in phrase and full of Biblical allusion, occurred with weekly regularity. Since it was a matter of public record that the shabby house on the back street behind the Reverend Watson Duncan's white cottage was so heavily "papered" with mortgages held by T. Elihu that a coat of paint was out of the question, this hammering of T. Elihu was viewed not only as a piece of colossal foolishness, but also as a practice in doubtful good taste.

Naturally it redounded to T. Elihu's credit. The administration was always fair game, but he was not a public servant, nor had he yet sought that honor. And the wage scale in his foundries was T. Elihu's own affair; his rating in the community proved that he was quite able to take care of his business ventures without the aid of a theoretical old incompetent who could not endure another's success without giving way to envious criticism. And the allegation (the same which the *Courier* periodically invited him to "disprove") that the Warchester Construction Company derived pernicious profits through the administration's favoritism, was openly derided. The construction company underbid its competitors because it had unlimited funds at its disposal, and T. Elihu's constructive brain behind it. And who wanted any better pavement than the new one on Front Street, anyway?

As for T. Elihu, he merely laughed good-naturedly; and according to popular opinion the *Courier* existed only by the grace of his well-known big-heartedness. David Landis alone had reason to know that such laughter was but a surface ripple which obscured dangerous depths, just as he alone realized that the *Courier* might have been the one to patronize, while the *Gazette* languished upon the stands, if only he could have laid aside his set of old-fashioned scruples and met opportunity half way when T. Elihu entered the market, ten years before, in search of a suitable advertising medium for his budding greatness.

Instead, about the time T. Elihu began to spend thought upon a proper site for the red-brick house Landis acquired his first mortgage, calculated to relieve nothing more than a temporary embarrassment. But somehow the *Gazette* had begun immediately to cut the ground from under his feet, until, slipping deeper and deeper into debt with each new year, he had finally reached a hopeless maximum. The *Courier*, however, remained unsubsidized and, contrary to general belief, free from incumbrance. And its sole owner, who had sacrificed everything to retain it, continued to supply it with involved and tedious editorials aimed at the "party in power, and the power behind the party," without seeming to learn that ridicule is the one deadly battery which all the logic in the world cannot combat.

He came and went, a huge, white-haired, white-bearded figure, prophet-like and a bit pathetic, though no one took any stock in his prophecy of revelation and retribution to come, or believed that he had any one but himself to blame. Capable of seeing both sides of a question, he was useless as a political henchman. As a newspaperman he left almost as much to be desired. He had been known to omit the most piquant details of a local scandal entirely, simply because the woman's husband had once been his friend. And Tivotson, the *Courier's* editor and reportorial staff, laid most of his weekly sprees at his superior's door. When well in his cups, Tivotson was wont to complain tearfully that "the boss" would table at any time the newest instalment of testimony in a murder trial, if he wasn't watched, to make room for a lively discussion of a new phase of the Baconian-Shakespearian controversy.

"Old Dave" Landis had grown old in achieving failure, but he was not envious of T. Elihu Banks, who, willing to help him along the way to fortune, had been forced, willy-nilly, to ruin him. His bearing toward the town's great man could not have been more cheerful, outside his official capacity, had the latter been his benefactor in fact. It was only on rare occasions that he gave way to regret—only now and then, when he chanced upon a report chronicling the activities of the younger set and noted that his daughter's name was not in the list headed among

those present. Now and then, coming upon the girl while she was diligently lengthening a threadbare skirt, or talking softly to herself over a stocking long past redemption, he let himself wonder whether he had chosen wisely, after all. And yet Carol Landis was the one thing closely identified with his own existence, which did not seem to appeal, mutely or otherwise, for commiseration.

The unpainted house on the back street had grown to look like its owner; it was sadly down at the heel. The *Courier* reflected his image flawlessly. But she resembled him not at all. Her smooth skin and coloring had come from her mother, and seeming delicacy, which was even stronger to endure than his big-boned frame. Hers was a more vivid personality; she was alive to her finger-tips—as alive as he was dreamy and absent-minded. And, whenever he mentioned the subject, she curled her lips at him and scoffed at the idea of a new dress and chided him for thinking of such extravagance. In no wise hindered from thinking her own thoughts, she sat and listened by the hour to his essays—reams and reams of them, which ultimately drove Tivotson to further excesses—bobbing her head enthusiastically at intervals over preachments which she scarcely heard and never understood, while he, innocently delighted and temporarily reinstated in his own self-respect, believed that she was hanging breathlessly upon every word. Hungry to act, she proved herself

daily a consummate artist; she treated him like the veriest Apostle of Success. And his air toward her was so beautiful a mixture of courtly deference and apologetic humility that, oftener than not, it brought desperate hot tears to her eyes—tears which she never dared let him see, lest they mar the entire performance.

And she played the same game with Jimmy Gordon; played it more skilfully, if anything, for Jimmy's eyes were sharper. That Sunday afternoon she left him alone in the front room as if nothing at all was amiss. Her going was followed immediately by a most cheerfully energetic shaking of a grate. To this noise the boy gave no heed, but later he did raise his head and sniff at the penetrating odor of coffee. And he had finished cleansing his hands and face before she spread a frayed napkin upon the kitchen table and placed plate and cup upon it, and sang out for him to come.

He was wolfishly hungry. Some of the bitterness left his eyes as he accepted the second cup of scalding liquid which she poured and urged upon him—though he needed urging little enough in truth. Then she laid aside her apron and drew a chair up close to his. With her hands tucked childishly under her, she sat and watched him eat, but she smothered her impulse to mother him. She kept her eyes from straying to the bandaged hand, which would have been the better for a strip of whiter linen. And

before her matter-of-fact delight in his splendid appetite he slowly began to regain his outward usualness. He showed a faint interest in her mad little costume, and she, waiting for an opportunity to make conversation, seized avidly upon the question in his eyes.

"The wardrobe woman had more work than she could do," she explained, "so they let me bring mine home to fit it myself. It was too big around the waist."

Jimmy nodded. She remained quiet for a moment, considering carefully the words which she finally decided to venture.

"Did you—did you try to get to anybody with your play?" she hesitated.

It was a topic which rarely failed to stir him, no matter how dark his mood, yet his second nod was almost as spiritless as the first.

"A few hundred I think," he said, with a feeble attempt at humor. "I lost count after the first days."

He paused, and she misunderstood the dulness in his words, and found it hard to answer.

"I tried all the little ones first," he went on, "and never got past the office boy. They were all too busy, and I don't suppose I looked like a walking advertisement of prosperity, either. And then I tried Harding—and he saw me. He gave me a half-hour, and told me to come back in a week, after he had had a chance to read the stuff over."

At that she leaned forward, her hands going impulsively to his knees.

"Not Harding!" she breathed. "When all the rest refused you? Tell me, Jimmy, what does he look like?"

The boy smiled a little over her very feminine query and cast about for a suitable means of comparison.

"More like a country minister than anything else," he said at last. "Sort of tired-looking and discouraged. And his clothes were in almost as bad condition as my own. They looked as though they'd never been pressed." Before the glow in her eyes he did his best to maintain a manner of indifference. "He read the play, and offered to buy the first act climax." (Her gasp checked him momentarily.) "The rest was rubbish, he said. But he advised me not to sell. He said time might cure me of the besetting sin of all playwrights—some day I wouldn't be so young and tragic—if I didn't starve to death."

"And you're not going to?" she asked quickly.

Again his peculiarly crooked grin.

"Sell or starve? I took his advice and refused his offer. But the second possibility doesn't seem so remote, at that, just at present. May I have some more coffee, Carol?"

She sprang up and brought it to him with an immediacy so fervid that it was not unlike a caress.

And she stood over him then, contemplating his face so steadfastly that he was constrained to laugh, at length, self-consciously.

"No one will ever know, Carol," he said, "how many times you have saved my life in just such a fashion as this until I tell them."

But her small face remained grave.

"You've had trouble again at home," she accused him. "Worse than usual?"

He nodded rather blithely.

"Worse than usual," he admitted.

"Over me?"

He protested too volubly, so that even his detailed account of the dog fight, meant to be gay and inconsequential, failed to deceive her.

"I know," she insisted, with a calm stubbornness that she had inherited from her father. "I know!" She leaned nearer, her face filled with a strangely vehement tenderness. "Then you were going to stay! You *want* to stay. Jimmy, are you sure you really care for her, so very, very much?"

The boy's face flamed guiltily. His stiff gesture was so restrainedly violent that she removed her tightened fingers from his shoulders and stepped back from him. But she clung to the topic.

"You think you do," she persisted. "And you think that's what's holding you here. But it isn't, Jimmy." It was her turn to lift a hand and cut him short as he started to interrupt. "Oh, I know—I

understand! They've treated you worse than they have me, and haven't I told myself, a thousand times, that some day I'd make them proud to know me? Don't you suppose that I notice how careful they are not to see me on the street, now that I've started rehearsals? It's because they're all against you that you refuse to give up. But I wish you'd go. You can get along somehow; it couldn't be any harder anywhere than it is for you here. I wish you'd go before they drive you out—or before they drive you to something worse."

Her voice had grown husky; she turned away from him to hide the look upon her face. In the silence that followed neither of them heard the steps of him who had come, without knocking, into the front room. And when the girl's head flashed up again, Sidney Banks was standing in the doorway. Too startled to speak at first, she stood staring at him. And then, her cheeks scarlet under the unconcealed relish in his regard, abruptly she dropped to her knees. The puffy black skirt mushroomed about her on the floor.

Sidney chuckled softly his approval of this move—an obvious challenge. Still chuckling, he advanced farther into the room, without the formality of removing his hat, until he stood above the little, kneeling figure, too happily diverted to notice the boy at the table, whose head had shot up at the sound.

"What a timid, small person it is!" he laughed.

And he bent over and was trying to lift her erect, when a hand dropped upon his elbow, checking both his intention and the girl's fierce effort to be free.

Instantly Sidney's expression, meant to be that of a man wise in just such little affairs, suffered a remarkable change. It evinced more than a hint of dismay, and, save for the negligible movement necessary to release the girl's arms, he stood utterly motionless, like one who, doubtless regretting an unfortunate precipitancy, still hopes to forestall open violence. David Landis was a big man.

Then bit by bit his head came around. And then, meeting the gaze of the sorry figure in blue serge, he was able to laugh again, shakily, albeit with much relief.

"Greetings, cousin mine," he exclaimed over a deep breath. "But why the hostile mien?"

Jimmy Gordon's eyelids were blinking with amazing rapidity.

"Let her alone," he said sullenly.

Sidney's eyebrows lifted. His return to equanimity was complete.

"And why, pray tell me," he asked—"why shouldn't I assist a young lady to her feet if I so choose?"

He turned to Carol Landis. This time the bandaged hand rested more heavily upon his coat sleeve.

"Let her alone."

Jimmy's voice was hoarsely expressionless, for he

made no effort to equal or outdo his cousin's airiness, but again it made the latter pause.

"Can't you see she doesn't want you to see her dressed like that?"

Sidney's head went back and he gave way to immoderate laughter. He was immensely amused.

"A member of the Palace Theater chorus," he murmured, "and yet sensitive over the matter of abbreviated draperies. Cousin James, your argument is sadly lacking in logic."

Suddenly the girl's lips began to quiver. Her head drooped over until the hot resentment in her eyes was hidden. Jimmy groped and touched her shoulder clumsily.

"This isn't the Palace Theater," he explained, with seeming weary mildness. "She doesn't want you to see her dressed like that."

With that monotonous reiteration Sidney found the situation grown awkward once more. He had never before seen his cousin's chronically colorless face so peculiarly white. And though it was his opinion, but lately voiced, that Jimmy was too lackadaisical to be dangerous, he accepted discretion as the better part of valor.

"A truly crushing retort, my knight in buckram," he said, and he paid mock homage to the girl with a flourish. "My mistake—my deepest apologies. May I tarry long enough to inquire whether your father is available?"

She lifted a fierce, small face without offering to reply. So Jimmy took that office upon himself.

"He's not at home just now," he answered; and after a measured pause. "You wouldn't care to wait for him, would you?"

"Indeed not! Scarcely! Give me credit for a shred of delicacy, at least. I have already intruded too long. When he gets in tell him that the Governor wants to see him; an urgent matter, I believe. And for the rest, Jimmy, you're more of a devil of a chap than I had believed, up to date. Congratulations—and adios!"

With another low bow he wheeled. They heard him laughing softly as he passed out. After he had gone the girl came slowly to her feet. Jimmy was gazing fixedly at the doorway through which Sidney had disappeared, and she stood watching his face, as if fascinated by what she found therein. When he started slowly to follow, she reached out and restrained him. He was breathing hard.

"Why—why, Jimmy!" she murmured. "You're not really angry? You don't really mind because he——"

He broke in with his oddly violent gesture.

"I've already told you just how it would be." His voice sounded thick. "And he's not half as bad as you'll find most of the others. He only tries to be. You've picked the hardest profession there is, to succeed in—and the easiest."

The entire accumulation of his slow rage was thus turned upon her, but she bore up under it surprisingly well; she was more than anything unaccountably pleased. For it was the first comment that he had made upon her impending departure.

"But they—*they* like him, Jimmy," she replied with disarming demureness. "They accept him. Evelyn Latham entertains him, as often as he cares to be entertained. And if he's all right, then it must be so, mustn't it? I guess there's something very wrong about you and me."

Her resignation was too meek. Jimmy refused to be misled by it—refused to go back to the argument which she had picked up as though nothing had happened. He consulted his unreliable timepiece.

"It's a quarter to eight," he said. "We'd better be starting down."

That statement proved effectual. She ran from the room and came back wrapped to the ankles in an old coat.

"I was waiting for father," she said. "He's so very prompt usually. He insists on convoying me to and from the theater whenever I have to go after dark, though it's absurd of him to think I need an escort, when I'll soon have to look after myself without any help at all. I think it's because he's already lonely. Sometimes I think I can't go, only I know my staying now would be even harder for him to bear. I wonder why T. Elihu wants to see him?"

"Politics," replied Jimmy succinctly. "There's something doing; they're lining up for next election."

"But father doesn't sympathize with Mr. Banks's policies," she objected. At the door she halted uncertainly. Then she got the next words over with as quickly as possible. "It's not necessary for you to come with me either, Jimmy," she said. "If you'd rather not walk down with me—for any reason—I—I won't mind. I'm not considered a very proper person to be seen with now, you know. You're tired out, too; and father will be certain to come for me when it is time for the rehearsal to be over."

Dull color stained Jimmy's face. Without a word, he motioned for her to pass out, turned down the lamp wick and joined her on the ramshackle steps.

"I was thinking of dropping in at Hanlon's anyway," he answered absently. "I might just as well walk along."

The unenthusiastic and scarcely flattering explanation drove the resolutely cheerful smile from her lips; but the next step, when she would have started down the unpaved street, he found her arm and turned her instead into the path that led through the orchard and desolate garden patch, past the Reverend Watson Duncan's very back door. At that she stole one glance at his set face and found it difficult to read. After he had helped her through the barbed-wire fence she arrived at the reason for this choice of route without any help from him. The counte-

nance which she lifted to his was fairly radiant.

"I usually go the other way around," she told him. "It's longer, but——"

He flushed guiltily before such shining eyes.

"We can't stand here talking all night," he interrupted. "It's nearly eight—unless you *want* to be called down by the manager."

Ungracious as the warning was, she seemed to find it doubly dear because of its very gruffness. More than that, she seized the arm nearest her and hugged it to her impulsively. And she echoed, happily, the remark which Abel Thompson had voiced, some hours earlier, that same day.

"What a funny boy you are! I'm never certain just what is in your mind." She considered that statement and found it inadequate. "Do you believe I would have cared if you hadn't wanted to come? Why, Jimmy, I'm never going to care—it's never going to make any difference to me—no matter what you do."

CHAPTER VIII

A FORMIDABLE PERSONAGE

AND with that she found it easy to talk about herself and the "career" that lay before her. With her little, high-heeled slippers tucked under her one arm, she hurried to keep pace with his long stride, chattering eagerly, though breathlessly, with every step. And there was no uncertainty, no doubt in a glorious destiny, to mar the perfection of her anticipation.

"And so, you see, you won't have to worry one bit about me. After living as father and I have had to live, ever since I can remember, one-night stands can't have any terrors for me. It'll be hard, I know how hard it'll be, but I'll get on. . . . Mr. Whitby—he's our manager—has told me twice that I have done remarkably well. Only yesterday he said that I was wasting my time with a musical show. My voice isn't big enough—it'll never amount to much. And this is the day of small leading women, since folks have grown tired of so much tragedy. But it's a start, isn't it, Jimmy? And that's what counts. Who knows? Maybe Harding will come to me some day, begging me to play the lead in one of your own plays. I shall be very "up stage" about it—haven't I picked up a lot of theatrical expressions? No doubt

I shall insist at first that it is out of the question, until he chances to let slip the fact that the author is an old, old friend of mine—a Mr. Gordon, formerly of Warchester. Then, of course, I'll reconsider the proposition. Maybe you'll come to try and persuade me yourself. And we'll go out to dinner—a little round table with pink-shaded candles, and no flowers at all to bother. I'll never be very big, I'm afraid, but for the first half hour or so I expect you'll be quite uncomfortable and mystified, Jimmy, and a little dismayed at such a formidable personage. And then—then I'm afraid I won't be able to play-act any longer. I'm afraid I shall lean over, when the waiter isn't looking, and—and——”

The white dresses were gone from the Latham veranda as they passed down Warchester's proudest thoroughfare—a little figure in a nondescript cloak, whose tongue raced on with desperate cheerfulness, and a thin one, stooped for want of rest, who tried to smile as he listened.

He was careful not to raise his eyes to the white cottage that stood near the edge of the Latham grounds. She chattered so continuously that they were passing St. Luke's Church before he knew it. A late couple or two, scurrying to evening service, gave the pair a queer glance or two as they went by. And then, as the notes of a pipe-organ came swelling with rumbling grandeur through the opened vestry door,

Carol's hand sought his and clung to it with a passionately tight grip. He looked down and found her watching him from brimming eyes. Though he did not know it, she realized, without having to reason it out, that this was to be their last walk together for many and many a year. The boy choir was singing. She sobbed brokenly, aloud:

"Whatever you decide to do—wherever you go—you'll let me hear from you, won't you, Jimmy? Promise! No, don't shake your head. Promise—I want to hear you say you will. And I'll be with you, just the same, no matter where I am. Oh, I did want so much to go away cheerfully. I meant to, and here I am crying all over my new costume. But I can write to you. Perhaps I'll be playing somewhere near you, some day, and you can come and watch me act. Oh, how I hate this town!"

As long as the boy lived he was never able to remember that moment without a painful tightening of his throat. Without being ashamed of it, he returned the pressure of the warm fingers curled about his own.

"I'll do my best," he muttered. "I'll be all right. And I didn't mean what I said, back at the house. I know you will always take care of yourself."

By the time they reached the head of the alley that led past the Palace Theater stage door to Pegleg's Place she had stopped crying; she was even smiling again. He opened the door for her. A tiny piano

back-stage was banging out the same mad little tune to which she had timed her capricious dance steps, before the mirror, an hour before. She stood with her hand on the knob of the door, looking back at him.

"Do you want to come in and watch?" she asked. "Would they mind? Don't they know you here?"

Over her shoulder Jimmy nodded to a stage-hand, and he repeated the greeting for the benefit of Abel Thompson as that gentleman of color came hurrying up, importantly bent upon exercising his authority as keeper of the gate. Abel thawed as he became aware of the identity of this cavalier.

"Evenin', Miss Landis." He made of the salutation a ceremonial. "Evenin', Mist' Goh'don. They done called for the chorus awready, miss. Yuh bet' run along." And there he abandoned formality. "Comin' in, Jimmy?" he inquired.

The boy shook his head.

"I'll wait for you here," he said to the girl. "I'll be here when you come out."

And he had dropped to the step, his thin face propped in his hands the next moment, without hearing her reply that it was not necessary for him to wait. She stood there, one hand half stretched out toward him, until Abel Thompson repeated his warning. And that was the way she remembered him, through many long years.

For a time Jimmy managed to keep awake, with

no little assistance from the hard stone step and piano within. For a time he heard the strain of that mad tune, repeated with nerve-racking monotony: "If you're going to love me, love me, love me—if you're going to love me at all." Then the rhythm became indistinct; the words ill-matched with the music. And he was puzzling mildly at the oddity of an anthem set to syncopation, when he fell asleep.

His body slept, and his brain, and yet he was conscious of things which transpired about him. He knew when the piano's din ceased entirely; he knew when two men stopped there in the alley in front of him and contemplated his bowed head. One of them spoke his name, compassionately, but he was unable to move or answer. And he was wondering what old David Landis was doing in the company of Pegleg Hanlon, wondering what had brought him to Hanlon's Hotel, when he felt himself lifted and borne along on strong arms. The owner of those arms limped as he walked, and the uneven motion disturbed his slumber. And then the sun was in his eyes. He woke with a start, and lay blinking at the strong light streaming upon his face from an open window. Pegleg himself was standing beside the bed, grinning down at him like a good-natured satyr. Still blinking, Jimmy looked about him, and the very cleanliness of the room told him where he was. All of Hanlon's rooms were kept spotless.

"So I didn't dream it, eh?" he began, stretch-

ing himself luxuriously. "You brought me in?" Pegleg shook his huge, shaggy head.

"I did," he answered. "Carried ye—like a blessed infant. And it's little more ye weight than many that's only half grown. Since whin have ye taken to sleepin' on the stones?"

At that question the boy's face grew a little disturbed.

"I was waiting to take a lady home," he explained, lugubriously. "Miss Landis—but I suppose her father met her?"

Hanlon seemed to find that query worthy of a little thought.

"He did, he admitted. And, watching the boy's face keenly: "Ye were awake, thin? They've already learned ye to sleep with one av your ears open."

"Yes, and no." Jimmy's grin was most engagingly disarming. "I did, and I didn't. I thought I heard him, talking, but I wasn't quite certain whether it was a dream or not." He paused while his eyes swung thoughtfully around the room. There was a humorous crook to his lips when he went on. "Pegleg," he asked, "what's the best rate you could make me on a suite such as this—your very best—for an indefinite period?"

The Irishman's great head came forward at that. He squinted as though the matter was a serious one.

"So they've driven ye out at last, have they?" he

growled. "They've cast ye for-rth to her-rd with your own kind?"

"They have," admitted Jimmy. "Bag-less and baggage-less. Pegleg, are you purposely avoiding a direct answer to my question?"

'And then Pegleg caught the bruised look in the boy's eyes.

" 'Tis meself that's a poor one to be quotin' Scripture," he rumbled, "and 'tis an uncharitable thing, anyhow, to inflict it upon ye, on an empty stomach. But, though I fail to remimber the verse, unless I'm wor-rse mistaken than usual, there's a Biblical precedent for your predicament. Did ye mention an indefinite period?"

"Necessarily so," said the boy.

"Thin the problem requires deep meditation," stated Pegleg. "I'll make my decision in no unchristian haste. Some I accept without credentials av anny sort whatever, being something av a student av human nature; to some—not many—I suggest payment in advance. I have heard unpromising tales concerning you, me young and grinnin' friend. In view of your imminintly respectable connections, me confidence is none too str-rong. Now, will ye have your breakfast served to ye in bed, or will ye rise and come downstairs and eat your dinner like respectable folks that sleep o' nights?" His scrutiny grew shrewd. "I've a deal to question ye about. Maybe a bit av a discussion will remove some av the

indefiniteness from your mind. Maybe 'twill prove fruitful for the both av us, who knows? Git up, ye instigator av Sabbath riot an' unholy conflict. An' pray God, me lad, ye're always able to laugh."

After he had left the room Jimmy lay pondering his words until the smile became fixed upon his lips. Then he took the surest way of solving the riddle in them: he rose and dressed and joined Pegleg in the public room downstairs. Seated opposite each other at a round table drawn up close to the windows that overlooked the river they ate for a time in silence. And then, abruptly, Pegleg spoke of the matter that was on his mind.

"Ye're broke, I suppose," he said, with fine candor. "No doubt ye've squandered yere sustinence in riotous living."

Jimmy jingled a handful of small coins in his pocket and assumed an injured air.

"I always knew I'd find you out some day, Pegleg," he countered. "You're taking no chance on a guest who may prove unable to pay. But I'd have you know that I'm at present still a gentleman of some means."

Pegleg's eyes twinkled.

"Sur-re, an' there was a time whin such means as yours might have been an asset, instead av a disqualification. 'Twas once the genteel thing, right here in Warchester, to be poor but proud, though the vogue has come to be of late more or less frowned upon.

To the divil wit ye and your two-dollar-bill calamity fund that ye have boarded up there in your vest pocket. Ye're broke. Ye never were anything else. The vital issue is—are ye too proud to wor-rk?"

Jimmy was glancing absently at his watch as he made reply.

"That depends," he temporized, "on how much the occupation which you have in mind might interfere with the profession I've already adopted."

"Meanin' that ye are still set upon augmentin' the present supply av current literachure?"

Jimmy sighed his whimsical affirmative.

"But supposin' that the proposition I'm about to lay before ye was itself av that nature?"

Immediately the boy's eyes showed a gleam of comprehension. He recalled several phrases of his stepfather's tirade which had themselves been an echo of T. Elihu's earlier lengthy discourse; he remembered that David Landis had been with Hanlon, just before the latter lifted him from the stage-door step of the Palace Theater and carried him in to bed.

"You mean the *Courier*?" he asked, though the question was needless, for Pegleg's proposition was already quite clear.

"Ye always were a quick wan to find the kernel in the nut." Pegleg admitted the correctness of the conclusion. "And 'twould be better than starving in a garret unless ye consider such an attachment

beneath the contempt av one av your high aims and ability."

At that the boy smiled feebly.

"Don't," he laughed. "Don't be too rough, Pegleg. I'm more sensitive than I was before I went away. What duties would the attachment entail?"

"Gineral utility, av course," Pegleg explained. "Reporter is the customary polite term applied to the same. Office-boy, maybe, now and then; and editor-in-chief during the Tivotson's unfortunate digressions from the paths av temperance."

For a moment Jimmy was quiet.

"Whose idea was it—yours?" he murmured then.

"Mine and that av me esteemed and scholarly contemporary, Dave Landis." Pegleg could no longer ignore the expression upon the other's face. Obviously the boy's heart was not in the conversation. "Ye don't seem to be wildly elated at the prospect."

"It's not that," objected Jimmy quickly. "It's only that I'm not certain yet, whether——"

Pegleg dropped his heavily facetious manner.

"Maybe I've not elucidated with sufficient clarity," he interrupted; and eyeing the boy's averted face steadily: "What gossip might ye have already heard whispered concerning the comin' elections?" he inquired.

Jimmy blinked. His thin face grew quizzical.

"Not much," he laughed, "and what I have heard wasn't spoken in a whisper, either. But from it I gathered that Warchester stood threatened by a great moral and political house-cleaning. In fact, my own roofless state is the outcome of righteous forbearance too long imposed upon. I'm the first warning example."

"Ye heard with accuracy." Suddenly Pegleg rumbled an oath. "By anny chance did your informer confide in ye the names or name av those behind this rebellion av respectability?"

"Only in a vague way." There was sheer delight in Jimmy's grin. "I was given to understand that this would be a campaign uncontaminated by the vicious practices of party politics."

"To hell ye were," cried Pegleg joyously. "Be damned to ye, and yere crooked smile. Ye know better. They'll be namin' T. Elihu Banks for mayor before the fortnight is out. But do ye think he means to stop at that? Go 'way wid ye—I thought ye had more sense behind yere sleepy eyelids. Right now, I'm tellin' ye, he's practising a new signature. He's rehearsin' T. Elihu Banks, United States Senator, and greatly admirin' the flourishes bewhiles. Our imminint townsman is enjoyin' visions av Washington, D. C."

"And you hope to disappoint him, through the columns of the *Courier*?" asked Jimmy, with mild sarcasm.

Pegleg's seamed face became stern.

"We've weathered one business-man's administration av this city's affairs," he pounded on the table—"and it was businesslike in truth. Manny's the limousine that goes whizzin' up on the hill these days that came from a highly specialized knowledge av how to make two dollars sprout where only wan languished before. We have had some cliver min in our own circle, Jimmy—min av which we had reason to be proud. They were in politics for what they could get out av it, frankly and without blushing or trying to assure the populace that they were servin' because their country called. And they thought that they knew something about the special-privilege game, until your business-men shamed them for rank amateurs. 'Twas the most prolific year the bankruptcy courts had known in manny a season." A great frown creased Pegleg's forehead. "Jimmy, lad," he asked softly, "it's not because your nerve has gone back on you at last is it? Sur-re, T. Elihu Banks is a name to conjure with, and he talks large and frequent. Is it the name av Banks that gives ye pause for thought?"

"You know better," answered Jimmy. "And you're not trying to tell me, are you, Pegleg, that the news of my affiliation with the *Courier* would throw him into consternation?"

A cunning look swept Hanlon's features.

"More than ye believe," he shot back. "More

than ye think. Have ye ever stopped to wonder why ye have always been an aggravation in his sight?"

"More than once," Jimmy admitted. "It's beyond me. The answer's too difficult."

"—Unless, perhaps, he realizes that ye've seen through the sham av him, and *that* he will never forgive, for 'twould not be safe. Ye always were too modest, Jimmy; ye've never taken yerself serious enough, though God knows, if ye had, ye'd been dead by now. And T. Elihu's not finished with ye yet. Mark that! There's Dave Landis, and a dozen others I might mention, whom ye'd do well to consider." He shook his shaggy mane. "Ye don't say yes, nor no. Is it because ye hesitate to be identified with a discredited old misfit like Landis, or a pariah such as meself?"

For the first time Jimmy's voice held some heat.

"You know better than to talk like that, Pegleg. Haven't I come and asked you to take me in for a few days?"

"I brought ye," contradicted the other, sulkily. And then, with a mollified laugh: "Ye *are* one who knows that Hanlon's Hotel is not guilty av the name which people who would not brush their garments against its door-frame have given it. I'm a bit proud av me place, Jimmy. That would shock thim, eh, if they could hear me speak like that? I've tried to keep it clean and savory, for the use av thim that's not so lucky as some, and they're no more particular

in the Bay State itself concerning the matter av registry than I am here, though they tell me that lack av baggage calls for paymint in advance.

"I'm askin' your pardon for the break, and the room is yours till ye wish to quit it. But I'm not hidin' my disappointment because ye're not eager for the chance. Somehow I got it into my head that ye'd leap at it. This is your own home town, though no man knows ye well would contend that ye have cause to cherish it. Yet there's manny in it would listen to ye, more than ye know, to whom ye've gave help and money without considering the excellence av the investment. I thought ye might say a word or two to thim, through the colyums av the *Courier*—maybe say a word or two for such as thim that frequents me ill-favored joint. But ye're not ripe for even a consideration av the project. I should have waited, maybe, until——"

"It's not that," interjected Jimmy. "It's only that I'm not sure—if you want to wait——"

"Take a day or two and think it over," advised Pegleg heartily. "And while I know that the figure is givin' ye no trouble, I'll tell ye now that the salary will at least pay for your board and keep. Think it over thin, whin ye get your bearin's. Ye've only been home two days."

"I will," said Jimmy soberly. "And I'm not half as grateful as I ought to be. Not two days, Pegleg. I got in late yesterday afternoon."

"So ye didn't know," he chuckled. "I wondered. To-day's Chuesday, me lad, not Monday. And it was Sunday night I picked ye up sleepin' in the allgey—Sunday night at twelve. Ye've been dead to the world for thirty-six hours, or thereabouts. Tourin' is wearing on the flesh, 'tis true. Ye should patronize the parlor cars more, me ramblin' young friend."

Jimmy's face became something aghast.

"Tuesday," he echoed blankly. "You're joking me, Pegleg." And, rising hurriedly as Pegleg's nod corroborated his words, "I'll—I'll let you know later. I wish I could say yes, but I'm not just sure. . . . I don't have to thank you for the room. I'll let you know in the morning."

With as much haste as Pegleg had ever seen him show, he left the room. Outside, in the alley, he paused long enough for a word with Abel Thompson, who was lounging at perfect ease in the stage-doorway.

"They done finished with the dress-rehearsal aw'ready," Abel answered the boy's question. "Reg'lar pufformance scheduled for eight-thutty to-night. Goin' be some affair—some affair! An', man, ain't 'at young Mist' Banks got a plenty o' new ideas? Nevah did have so much responsibility hangin' ovah mah head befoh. Flowers fom all nem young ladies—ev'ything gotta be high-class and genteel 'round this old show-house to-night. Ev'ybody on the jump, till I ain't got time lef' to breathe."

Driven as he was, however, he continued to lounge in the doorway, giving thought to Jimmy's hurried disappearance.

"Goin' somewheres," he concluded profoundly, aloud. "Goin' somewheres, 'at's sure. Must be impohtant, too, 'f it make him hustle like 'at."

And Abel's conclusion was accurate. Working on the theory that unpleasant tasks are best over with as soon as possible, Jimmy made two trips that afternoon between the Reverend Watson Duncan's white cottage up on the hill and Hanlon's Hotel. Two trips sufficed nicely to transfer his belongings—the typewriter and some few books and an armful of doubtfully serviceable clothes—from the room which overlooked the Latham grounds to that one which overlooked the oil-smeared "river."

No good-bys were indulged in, unless one might so class the long look which the boy gave the bench at the edge of the lawn beneath his window, for Mrs. Duncan was not at home, nor the reverend gentleman who had given the afternoon over to conference with Mr. Banks. On both trips Jimmy was accompanied by the grave and self-possessed Airedale, Oh Boy, who showed an unusual interest in the proceedings; and by six o'clock that evening the news had spread through Warchester's choicest residential district and all "downtown" as well.

Those who dwelt upon the heights remarked that at last Jimmy Gordon had reached his level—they

remarked it at considerable length, quite as though they had foretold it long before and took personal credit that it had finally come to pass. In other, obscurer, sections it made less of a stir. Indeed, it was discussed with a sort of lightness and a certain degree of pleasure. As Pegleg Hanlon had said, there were those in Warchester who actually sought and valued Jimmy Gordon's society. But the object of this divided comment gave it no heed whatever. He kept to himself throughout the rest of the day; he was occupied with other thoughts.

It turned cold with the coming of dusk, and the sudden drop in temperature was followed by a rainstorm more befitting November than late in August. An hour before Evelyn Latham's electric coupé was due to arrive, Jimmy had taken his place behind the pile of discarded scenery in the alley, a vantage point settled upon before it grew too dusky to choose. It was dark there in the shadow, but the stage-door, when opened, shed a pool of light upon the swimming pavement, where she would have to pass.

And waiting, the boy forgot even the rain. Now and then he shivered, but he was wholly content.

CHAPTER IX

THE SEASON'S SMARTEST FUNCTION

IN commenting upon the affair, characterized in the next morning's edition of the *Gazette* as "The Season's Smartest Society Function," so much space was devoted by Mr. Wainwright to a description of the "glittering, tinselled throng which began to seep into the Palace Theater looby long before eight-thirty, the hour set for the rising of the curtain," that it appears certain Mr. Wainwright must have viewed the influx from a point fully as advantageous as was Jimmy Gordon's, though, it is to hoped, somewhat less exposed.

For Mr. Wainwright devoted an entire paragraph to the foregathering of Warchester's best people—to the "staccato racket of motor cars and the sedate simplicity of the equipages of our older families." And while Jimmy's thoughts concerning the weather were less than negligible, since he gave it no thought at all, Mr. Wainwright, though conscious of the downpour, happily ignored its drawbacks and found in it added color for his pen.

"The broad sweep of pavement, glistening and sleek and mirror-like with rain, reflecting the myriad

lights of Main Street in blurred pools of brilliance, clicking to the passage of dainty slippers, which flashed from beneath high-swung draperies." . . . Indeed, it afforded the editor of the *Gazette* an opportunity to indulge his widely admired faculty for poetic phrasing, all too seldom called into play by the humdrum chronicling of duller daily news. And he indulged it to a glorification of the last muddy puddle before the Palace Theater curb, quite as though the puddle itself was a part of the excellent scheme of management and not the profanity-provoking result of Main Street's defective drainage before he plunged into the body of his report.

"Last night," he confidently assured the *Gazette* subscribers, "the old Palace Theater, itself an institution of doubtful antecedents and none too savory present-day associations—(By the way, when is Warchester to have a theater worthy of the name?)—was the scene of an affair which will long stand unmatched for novelty in the social annals of this city. For though such professional productions as have seemed worthy in the eyes of our appreciative though perhaps supercritical theatergoers, have from time to time been accorded a generous hearing, no gathering has ever equaled, either in individual brilliance or cosmopolitan flavor, that which filled the crowded auditorium last night to view the amateur performance enacted by members of our younger set in the interest of a prominent home charity.

“ . . . Students of dramatic form and expression, members of our local Dramatic League, competent to judge through years of study both of the methods of the moment and a former, perhaps old-fashioned but admittedly more artistic decade, and those of less serious bent, who came merely to be amused, rubbed elbows in pit and proscenium, alike delighted and astounded by the exhibition of histrionic ability which, while hitherto not entirely unsuspected, nevertheless exceeded their most optimistic expectations.

“With the verdict of the former,” Mr. Wainwright was happy to be able to state, “—those whose criticism has proved the bane of more than one metropolitan manager who has entered Warchester hoping to foist an inferior production upon a supposedly provincial audience—the *Gazette* is in entire accord. Never before has a more delicately shaded interpretation of a character’s moods been presented than was given by Miss Evelyn Latham, daughter of J. J. Latham, in the leading rôle. From her first entrance she dominated the stage, not alone because hers was the stellar part about which the action of the piece necessarily revolved, but by grace of the sheer magnetism of her own delightful personality, that paramount dramatic gift without which there is no supremacy upon the stage to-day.

“Miss Latham can act. No other phrase, no matter how adorned by superlative it might be,

could better express the consensus of opinion heard on all sides during the progress of the production. Her part was exacting in the extreme. It ran the entire gamut of emotions, from lighter moments in which her gay insouciance was ably supplemented by her cool self-certainty and delightfully modulated reading, to moments of tumultuous intensity, in which she literally brought the house forward in its seat by the magic of her art.

"Miss Latham is a consummate actress. The sure way in which she grappled with the tremendous moment which prefaced the third act curtain proved that beyond argument or doubt. More than all else that scene sent the critical portion of the audience—(already mentioned as lovers of the cultured and refined in art)—home shaking their heads, a little in wonder, a little in amaze. And while it is not the *Gazette's* wish to deplore the success of our well-known townsman, Mr. Latham, in matters commercial, we too shake our heads, not only in wonder, but a little with regret as well. Adversity was ever the lash which has spurred genius on to greater efforts. It is our unreserved opinion that Miss Latham, in other less happy circumstances, would have been one of the premier actresses of our day.

"But it must not be inferred from this account, devoted perhaps too enthusiastically so far to the personal triumph of the lead, that the rest of her supporting cast was far behind her, either in natural

ability or sincerity of effort. Indeed, the opposite is the case. For Miss Bennett, in the part of an ingenuous Miss, was so delicately girlish, and yet so earnest withal, that each moment while she was absent from the picture she was missed.

“ . . . And with those who came to be amused, those who came to be swayed by pathos and bathos alike, the *Gazette* laughed—laughed until its collective sides ached, and also wiped away a surreptitious tear. Mr. Lloyd Jameson, son of our eminent legal authority, has long enjoyed a reputation as the gay Lothario of Warchester’s younger set, but it remained for last night to clinch his claim to the title. Time after time the other actors had to hold their lines, while the audience rocked with mirth over his inimitable bits of business, for he gave full rein to his spirit of drollery. And yet more than one bright eye grew dim, more than one feminine heart was thrilled by his impassioned rendition of scenes of greater tenderness. No one who listened could very well blame the leading lady for being swept off her feet, as she was, of course, to achieve the happy ending which, perhaps too arbitrarily, our present-day audiences demand. There were many present who no doubt envied her that scene and forgot temporarily that it was only make-believe. The key-note of Mr. Jameson’s performance was its abandonment and spontaneity.

“ Due credit and unlimited thanks is extended

to Mr. Sidney Banks, whose name appears upon the program as the director of the piece. Mr. Banks, whose timely return to Warchester was a bit of great good luck, brought to bear a knowledge of matters theatrical too well-known to call for comment. The demonstration of his knowledge was a distinct pleasure."

In closing, Mr. Wainwright mentioned again the lights and the swirling throng, "the seemingly endless string of conveyances which whisked away, one by one, the members of the cast who, still in costume and make-up, surrounded the hosts of congratulatory friends, were the center of a colorful picture—a picture of hope and youth and romance that made another drama which took place scarcely an hour later, within a stone's throw of the Palace Theater, seem woefully drab and pitifully sordid by contrast.

"For this drama of viciousness staged behind the scenes of respectability, was enacted as well by the youth of Warchester, its arch-figure being all too well known to the citizenry of this town. A detailed account will be found in another column."

That concluding paragraph cost Mr. Wainwright more than a little thought and indecision, but the general avidity with which every *Gazette* reader folded back the sheet the next morning more than vindicated his resolve to run it as first conceived. There was less of verbiage in this second article, less of flowery adornment, Under its introductory black

type it stretched, a bald, bleak statement of fact.

"At an early hour this morning Hanlon's Hotel—better known as Pegleg's Place—was raided by an efficient squad of Warchester's guardians of law and order. For a long time now proprietors of Hanlon's ilk have been basking in false security, laughing no doubt up their sleeves at competitors too honest to infringe upon the statutes, secure in their confidence of continued immunity. But the time has come when this sort of an affront to public opinion and public morals will not be further tolerated. It has been forced upon the attention of many of our most influential and powerful citizens that either the present administration has not the courage to cope with the forces of depravity and crime, or else (a condition which we would prefer to believe unthinkable) deliberately chooses not to do so, lest it antagonize a class which is not to be scorned at the polls. In either eventuality it is plain, and has long been plain, that there is no halfway possible; half-hearted measures will not suffice. The columns of the *Gazette* have already quoted the remarks of Mr. T. E. Banks, our ablest townsman, upon this question. His words were clear and unequivocal. Now, as president of Warchester's new Civic Reform Society, he has begun to back up his words with deeds—deeds which can leave no doubt in the minds of all concerned that his is a fixed and courageous purpose which will brook no opposition.

"Hanlon's was raided last night at twelve-thirty o'clock. Twelve o'clock has long been prescribed as the closing hour for such places as Hanlon's is known to be. For several weeks Mr. Banks has caused this house and several others of like repute to be subjected to a rigorous system of surveillance, and last night Chief of Police Hendricks, sure finally of his ground, struck a swift and telling blow. Creeping cautiously down the alley which leads past the stage-door of the Palace Theater, the officers made their entrance through the front of the building ready to curb resistance or quell any attempt to warn the inmates. No resistance, however, was encountered. Instead all presented an air of serenity which might have deceived one less versed in the craft of those with whom he had to deal.

"But Chief Hendricks saw beneath the innocent surface indications and pressed deeper into the building. Characteristically reticent, he refused to go into detail concerning the capture of nine men and women, all of undesirable or suspicious character, who fell into his dragnet, or the scene of violence which his arrival surprised. But it is hinted that his appearance checked a disturbance which might have been entered upon the records as a misdemeanor far graver than an infringement against the excise laws or the statutes prohibiting gambling—bloodshed at least, and perhaps uglier manslaughter.

"Three of the women and the five men were given

an immediate hearing before Justice Jameson and dealt with according to the discretion of the court. A member of the Palace Theater Burlesque Company—a girl who it appears is known by no other name than Melody—is being held on bail, supplied by Hanlon, pending further examination, while the police are searching widely for one Whitey Garritty, well known to the police of other cities, whom he also had eluded before running foul of Warchester's force.

"Out of respect and consideration for a prominent divine of this community it was our thought to withhold from the list of prisoners given below the name of James Gordon, but the boy's stepfather, the Reverend Watson Duncan, called to the telephone shortly before our going to press, assured us that such was not his desire.

"I have identified myself with this movement," were Mr. Duncan's words. "It is a righteous movement—and I mean to go on with it. It will bring no hardship upon the innocent, but those who have sinned must lie in the beds they have themselves prepared. I no longer know any person by the name of James Gordon."

"The case of young Mr. Gordon (he has not yet reached his majority in years, though his experience is age-old) had not been disposed of when this issue went to press, so it is impossible for us to say what disposition was made of it. Toward him, however,

it must be remarked, Justice Jameson dealt with great forbearance and self-restraint, an attitude little merited by Gordon, though much to Mr. Jameson's credit. For the young man in question maintained a sullen silence throughout his examination, refusing to answer the questions which were put to him, or to enter any plea in his own behalf. He stood white and tight-lipped, as stubborn as the most hardened malefactor, and opened his mouth just once. When the girl called Melody, seemingly unable longer to control herself, leaped forward in the midst of the lesson which Justice Jameson was reading Gordon concerning the error of his ways, apparently to interject some defense of this young man whom she appeared to champion with almost possessive ferocity, his studied silence was broken. He threw up a hand with a smile so mild that it bordered on the insolent and checked the girl's misguided though no doubt generous impulse. "Don't!" he ordered her. "What's the use, now?"

"And these words the *Gazette* heartily echoes. This boy, kin of many of our best people, heir to countless advantages, has squandered every chance which was his by birth—every claim to pity and further consideration. The *Gazette* echoes his own words: "What's the use, now?" Whatever the course of the law, it cannot be too rigorous in the case of James Gordon."

And the arch-figure himself, at seven-thirty the

night before, little realizing how prominently he was to share the public prints with her whose appearance he was awaiting, lay back in the shelter of his heap of discarded scenery, numb to bodily discomfort, cheerfully unaware even of the passage of time until her electric drew up at the curb.

All other perplexities, some of them pressing, he had put away from him for the time being, just as before then, he had many times put the thought of hunger away from him, since there was no immediate prospect of dining. And when she finally arrived, before the press at the front of the house had become considerable, he, too, noted how the light lay reflected about her feet like pools of phosphorescence. And though his brain was promptly rendered incapable of Wainwright's poetic appreciation of the tinsel and glitter of the costumes, her wrap he dared to reach out and touch as she passed his hiding-place. The brush of that velvet cloak left his arm a-tingle.

Secure in his intimacy with Abel Thompson, whose own garb that evening would have lent tone to any gathering (it consisted of a dress coat, a lavender waistcoat, light trousers and high brown button boots), he had put away from him, earlier in the day, the thought of squandering a quarter for a gallery seat, together with the fear that he might have to watch from a seat far removed from her neighborhood. "Back-stage" had always been open to him

without comment or question, and as expected, Abel passed him into that restricted province, but not without a moment of hesitation, however, for the boy, wet and bedraggled, looked anything but prepossessing, even to Abel's ordinarily none too fastidious eye. It called forth a deal of anxiety and a word or two of warning advice.

"Nobody ain't goin' see you in back 'at ole book-case." Abel accompanied his hiding away with an argument meant to quiet his own doubts. "But you bet' stick pretty close. Ev' thing got look 'spectable, 'n' if anybody git a look at you they sure goin' to blame me."

Jimmy did not even give way to his crooked grin. The unconscious classification passed over his head, which was indication of his mood at that moment. Instead, he obeyed thankfully, and "stuck close," as he was bidden. And Mr. Wainwright, sitting out in front with his notebook and pencil carefully displayed, was favored by no more perfect view of the stage than was Jimmy when the curtain creaked up.

Those who had come to weigh the niceties of technique! Those who had come merely to be amused! Theirs was a poor and meager interest compared with the boy's. From that instant when Evelyn Latham made her first appearance, his heart palpitated painfully, quick with worship for that quality which Wainwright named her gay

insouciance, sick with dread lest she falter and be met with ridicule.

In other circumstances he might have frowned a little over a certain stiffness of gesture or shaken his head vaguely for a certain lack of warmth. He had absorbed even more than he himself realized from the harassed managers who came to Warchester to try out new productions. But in that hour he found nothing to criticize, or if he did the thought was denied life the moment it was born.

He saw little of the rest of the action; he heard scarce a line of dialogue other than those which she spoke; and when the first act curtain fell, in spite of Abel's warning, the space behind the bookcase was too small to hold both him and his swelling pride. In concert with a large portion of the male audience out in front, which had risen and was climbing painfully over neighbors' knees (Warchester audiences adhered to metropolitan customs, no matter how uncomfortable), he crept from behind his cover, after the actors had run for the dressing-rooms and the scene-shifters' hubbub was on, and picked his way into the alley.

It was still raining, and he sought his earlier shelter, with little thought of what he was doing, however, for his own play, lying beside his typewriter in his room at Hanlon's, was no longer a discarded, or even partially discredited, failure. It had become once more, temporarily, at least, a satisfactory foun-

dation for dreams, and he had flung away one cigarette to hiss out on the flooded pavement, and was puffing a second, when voices near at hand disturbed his deep content—voices engaged in a colloquy old in his ears and without interest, save that his instant recognition of both of them left him momentarily incredible.

"I never was so strong for that joint," he heard the girl called Melody express decidedly her disapproval of a New York café under discussion. "Too stiff! That full-dress regulation never did get by. Give me Henry's every time. Maybe some nights the boys did get rough, along toward morning, but they was always something doing, and nobody ever got hurt real bad. Been to Henry's, haven't you?"

"Yes-s-s, I think so." Sidney's voice, in reply, lacked that absolute complacency which usually marked it when he discussed Manhattan. "Of course, though, I don't seem quite able to recall——"

The girl cut in with a flattering, meaningful laugh.

"I get you," she exclaimed. "Most everybody who goes to Henry's ain't quite able to recall—that is, not until the morning after. Most of the good Indians I know like Henry's—most of the regulars, that is—and if he ain't a regular he don't get a table. This is a dreadful slow town, ain't it? I haven't been here long—just long enough to find out that there isn't a half dozen live ones in the whole burg."

Jimmy put aside his dreams, just as methodically

as he cupped one palm over his cigarette, to hide its point of light, and gave himself over, reluctantly, to listening. He placed Melody now, without difficulty or awkward embarrassment. She had a reputation; she was a fire-brand and a trouble-maker. And there was a note of throaty "elegance" in her voice now, an obvious effort to be "genteel," which made her conversation different from the idle chatter which anyone who cared to listen in the neighborhood of Hanlon's was always certain to hear.

Her observation brought instant agreement from Sidney. He was more himself again. His laughter was light and disparaging.

"Dead! My dear, this town has had the sleeping sickness ever since birth." He stopped to contemplate this statement, and found it pleasing. "But there are a few live ones in it, at that—just about a half dozen, as you say. And, of course, there's—there's no place in town like Henry's, but if you've got a friend—yesterday you suggested— How would you like to have something to eat after the show? There's a friend of mine——"

At that Jimmy realized that this was not a merely casual meeting. Rehearsal had brought Sidney to the vicinity of Hanlon's the day before, while Jimmy lay asleep.

"I'd be real pleased," Melody answered. "We'll wait for you after the curtain. We're settin' out in front, trying to keep from havin' hysterics, so's the

usher won't lead us gently outside, before it's finished. My, ain't the 'leadin' woman a scream!"

"It—it's rather amateurish, I suppose," Sidney admitted a little stiffly. "I—I'm supposed to be the director, but——"

Jimmy could see his cousin's face plainly for a second against the light of the open door. Melody's slight figure, closer to him, was not so easy to make out. But she was quick to perceive and cover her slip.

"You've done wonders," she established her opinion stoutly. "Wonders! That's what Rose says to me—she's my lady friend—just before the end of the act. Why, she says they wouldn't 'a' been no show at all without the directin'. And Rose ought to know. She was in the beauty ballet two months on the Roof. Well, you've got enough on your hands with that mob. See you later?"

Sidney nodded as he was entering the theater.

"As soon as I can get away," he called in a hushed voice. "They—they're waiting for me now."

Jimmy took one step after the girl as she scudded past him, holding her atrocity of a hat against her so that the feather might not be ruined by the rain, but he thought better of the impulse before she had seen or heard him. The objection which he might have obtruded was too vague to be put into words.

But as he watched the further unfolding of the plot during the second act, from behind his bookcase

shield, a position regained with some difficulty and an added admonition from Abel, he found it difficult to keep his attention from wandering. And during the next intermission he puzzled over the problem without seeking the open air. It was at worst only a harmless, foolish encounter—and yet, again and again, he rejected that view as inadequate.

All that Hanlon had said earlier in the day concerning the hotel which bore his name, the boy knew to be the truth. It was clean and orderly and honest. But there was much which had been left unsaid concerning those who patronized it. Their very presence made it no place for amateur wickedness, such as Sidney's. He told himself that doubtless Sidney's escapade did not include Pegleg's as a supper place, but recollection of the guile in Melody's voice bothered him. A few minutes later he reached out and detained the gentleman of color who was flying past, agleam with the heat and giddy with his sense of authority.

A word would not have checked Abel's passage in the slightest degree. Jimmy held fast to the skirt of the precious dress coat while he talked.

"Where's Pegleg to-night?" he asked.

"How I know?" he demanded testily, and strained tentatively on the coat. "How I know where white folks spend they evenin's! Leggo my coat, Jimmy. Now look! Din' I know they wouldn't get 'at table in 'ithout bustin' somethin'."

But Jimmy failed to heed his captive's fluttering to be free.

"Do you know whether he's going to be around to-night?"

Thereupon Abel put his mind upon the formulation of a suitable reply, since upon that depended his release.

"He ain' never 'roun' now nights twell two or three in the mawnin'," he stated. "Din' I tole you he's out 'lectioneerin'?"

Jimmy let him go.

All the boy's breathlessness was gone as he watched Evelyn Latham through the third and last act, though her conception of the emotional third act curtain was not responsible for the frown upon his forehead.

Yet he waited outside in the alley until the cast had gone tripping by, chattering together unintelligibly; he waited until the last "equipage in the seemingly endless string of conveyances had borne away the swirling throng." And Melody and her companion, Rose, cautiously joined by Sidney and Lloyd Jameson at the stage door, had preceded him by almost an hour, when he realized that the rain was cold upon his head. He had bared it when Evelyn passed him on the way to her car. He had been standing there longer than he knew, forgetting even to replace his cap.

The faint, familiar stoop in his shoulders was

more pronounced than usual as he approached the square brick hotel in the angle of the block and the river. Grave and preoccupied of face, he shook the clerk behind the desk into partial wakefulness. To Jimmy's suggestion that it was after closing time that supercilious one opened sluggish lids to see who might be the innocent-hearted purveyor of such a piece of news.

"Who t'——" he began, and then, recognizing the boy, he grinned. "'Lo, Jimmy," he said. "Closing time, eh? Oh, my; oh, my! If I ain't went and forgot that again!" Thereupon his voice became matter-of-fact and businesslike; indeed, not unlike that of T. E. Banks when the latter spoke on home trade. "They's a little game goin' on in the back room," he explained. "A couple of your swell young friends from up on the hill are giving the party. Melody steered 'em in."

Jimmy left him before the explanation was finished. He passed on to the larger room in which he had breakfasted that morning with Hanlon. This was deserted, but down the long hall that led to the rear of the house an edge of light showed beneath a door.

With his hand upon the knob he hesitated; when he tried the door, gently, he found it locked. But the key rattled at the first sound his effort made. The door opened a crack; and then the waiter, who looked flabby, stepped back and motioned the boy

to enter. There was a slight twitch at the corners of the waiter's lips, as though he wanted to laugh.

The eyes of every person in the room swung to meet him as Jimmy closed the door, furtive or defiant as the sex might be. Recognizing him, they turned away again, casually welcoming, bent upon giving their undivided attention to matters more remunerative. Only Sidney and Lloyd Jameson and the girl, Melody, continued to stare. The faces of the first two were somewhat stricken for a breath; and then, before Jimmy's utter disinterestedness and calm acceptance of their presence, Sidney drew one eyelid close. He motioned to the deck of cards which he held, and the chips upon the table.

"Little game, Jimmy, old top." He spoke with a cordiality hitherto foreign to him; his air was rollicking, but his chin quivered and betrayed him. "Luck's been running with the house. Want to sit in and help retrieve the honor of the family?"

Jimmy shook his head.

"Broke!" he stated laconically, and from him the word was apparently an acceptable joke, for a burst of laughter greeted it. But the mirth was not quite easy. It sounded too forced to be convincing. Whitey Garritty, seated on the far side of the table, behind a barrier of chips, curled his lip and spat, and centered his pale gaze upon Sidney.

"This is no game for amateurs. Shoot 'em, Sport. Your deal!"

The girls were not playing. Rose was sitting at Lloyd Jameson's shoulder, and Melody, perched upon the arm of Sidney's chair, had been chiding him for his bad luck and watching his cards with bright eyes. She remained in that position, but her flow of banter ceased with Jimmy's coming. And her smile became rigid and fixed. Whenever he raised his head Jimmy found her eyes upon his face, troubled and mutely questioning. He turned away to avoid that gleam, and found the waiter watching him, too. The waiter he questioned under his breath.

"Hanlon back yet?" he asked.

Every ear listened while the waiter made answer, but Jimmy, if he noticed, feigned not to have seen. Unconcerned to the point of indifference, he gave himself over to watching the game, standing a yard or two behind Sidney's back.

The change which came over that back room came slowly. The laughter ceased first, and then the comment, jocular or peevish, as the case might be, which had accompanied the playing of each, and men began to eye each other from the corners of their eyes, and turned toward Jimmy not at all.

In his cousin's face Jimmy had read the extent of Sidney's losses the moment he entered the room. In spite of an effort to maintain an air of gaiety, Sidney's face was sick and gray. He was worrying far more over the markers out against him than were those

who held them. For these latter knew how sure collections would be, even though the operation might be accompanied by a little delay and a certain sort of unpleasantness.

But now Sidney was the only one who laughed. His enjoyment of the game became boisterous, and with the change of luck, which veered suddenly his way, Whitey Garritty's equanimity began to suffer. Jimmy felt the latter's ugly gaze upon his face. Sidney won, and won again. Melody's eyes were black with fear. And then, with the room grown deadly quiet, Garritty rose and beat upon the table with his slim white hand. Sidney had just laid down a flush that beat his aces three.

"Where in hell are your eyes?" Whitey grated at the girl, and, as she shrank back, he whirled and motioned Jimmy to a chair with a jerky gesture. "Sit down," he snarled. "If you aren't going to sit in, sit down."

Jimmy's mild drawl answered him.

"Her eyes are all right, Garritty," he said. "She was watching. How do you suppose she's going to flash to you what he's holding when she knows I'm watching her?"

The girl quivered as though she had been struck. Men lurched to their feet and drew back against the wall. Rose whimpered and leaped, and the sleazy material of her skirt caught and ripped upon a splinter on the chair. Sidney sat with his mouth

open; Lloyd Jameson gulped aloud with joy, for to him the interference meant nothing yet, but a solution of a distressing financial muddle. And only the waiter failed to move. He knew his time for action had come and gone minutes before.

Now Garritty leaned across the table. It seemed that it had been quiet for hours. And then Jimmy was speaking again, slowly and distinctly.

"If you're going to get any more to-night, Garritty," he said, "you'll need the cold deck in your pocket."

With that Garritty's hand went crawling behind him, and came crawling back. Jimmy's lean face looked haggard, but his crooked grin arched his lips. And then the door which led into the long hall leaped convulsively. With the first blow that set it to vibrating upon its hinges the fear was gone from Melody's eyes. She lifted a chair and swung it with thin arms that bent like steel, and whipped it across the table into Garritty's face. Garritty went down. Tumult within rose above the tumult without, and drowned Chief Hendricks' first bellow for admittance. A shot splattered the plaster off the ceiling as Garritty went down. A woman screamed. When the waiter snapped off the lights and ripped open another door Jimmy dragged his cousin Sidney and Lloyd Jameson from beneath the table and jammed them before him into a passageway which led to the open air.

And then the lights were up again.

"Steady, you!" A voice warned the boy. He closed the door upon the pair's retreat and turned back into the room.

Jimmy was blinking as he faced the light. The eyes of Melody were clinging to him. And she was the only one of them all, jaunty or sullen as the sex might be, who attempted an explanation. Her fierce outburst an officer checked with an expert twist of her wrist, which made the bone crunch and brought her with a moan to her knees.

Hendricks, Warchester's Chief of Police, counted them off.

"Nine," he grunted succinctly. The crash of glass and a shivered window accounted for Whitey Garritty's escape. "Take them out to the wagon."

CHAPTER X

ACCORDING TO THE CODE

DAWN was but a gray promise in the east when Pegleg Hanlon raised his grizzled head and shook it, weary from argument and self-revilement. It was an hour since he had begun to talk to the bowed figure opposite him, and nothing had been accomplished by his effort save that the gruffness was gone from his own voice as he set himself to try again.

"Ye could have got away yerself," he said gently. "Why didn't ye?"

Jimmy shook his head without looking up. He had not looked up even once since he and Hanlon had entered the room. And his voice was dull, as though he, too, was too weary from fruitless discussion to carry the argument further.

"I don't know," he said. "I don't know."

"Why did ye interfere in the first place?" Hanlon persisted. "Ye knew that 'twas none of your affair—'twas not accordin' to the code."

"I don't know," said the boy.

"It was too raw for ye to stomach, eh? Was that it? Gawd, and it was raw, too! She told me—the girl—how they framed the pair av thim."

"I heard," said Jimmy. "Part of it. That's why I interfered, I guess, even when I knew it was no business of mine." Suddenly his head came up, and his voice was no longer muffled. "Who wants to stand by and see a—a pair of babies trimmed?"

"I thought so!" exclaimed Hanlon. "I thought so! Ye had to be on the level!" But there he abandoned an impulse to moralize. "She saved ye at that," he went on. "Mike says Garrity'd av gave it to you—it was there in his eyes. She saved ye—and now she's upstairs cryin' her eyes out, just like a dacint girl, because ye would not let her speak to the judge. And 'twas her that got ye into the trouble, Jimmy bhoy."

A sort of vague pity for a conclusion so wild showed in Jimmy's pale eyes.

"I did it myself," he contradicted doggedly. "I—I've had it coming to me for—for months."

It was the same twist that the argument had taken time and time before. Hanlon struck the paper on the table before him a mighty blow with his open hand.

"The hell ye have!" he roared. "The hell ye have! It's too late now, eh?" His fist clenched as he quoted bitterly Mr. Wainwright's careful phrases. "Whatever the course av the law may be, eh? Then, by God, I'll be the law unto this affair. Ye followed thim in to take care av thim—they who have crossed the street rather than pass ye on the same side av the

road. Ye shoved thim ahead av ye—and got it yerself! Now, Jimmy bhoy, I'm askin' ye again, without blasphemy on me tongue—what are ye going to do?"

Sudden, bitter, boyish tears of rage filled Jimmy's eyes.

"What is there to do?" he cried. "You sit there and ask me that again. You know better, Pegleg. They showed me that they didn't want me here. They've been showing me that for years, yet I came back and gave them another chance. And now—now Jameson has given me twenty-four hours to get out of town—twenty-four hours! That's what they give to vagrants, Pegleg, and drunken wrecks that it does no good to lock up." His laughter shrilled high and hysterical. "Well, I don't need twenty-four hours. I'm going—and going now!"

Hanlon's hard face grew wondrous tender. Even fifty years was a short time in which to have acquired an understanding such as that. He reached out a rough paw as if to touch the boy's slack hand, and drew it back, self-consciously.

"Ye're tellin' me nothing that I'm not afther knowin' already, lad," he murmured. "But I'm tellin' ye something that ye don't seem willing to grasp. Ye don't have to go—unless ye *have* to! Is that what ye mean?"

"I have to." The boy's breath sobbed in his throat.

"—Nobody's talked," went on Pegleg patiently. 'Tis not the honorable thing among thieves and rogues and cutthroats to gossip to the detriment av the life and liberty av a colleague. But 'tis Hanlon who's not above droppin' a word, quiet and persuasive like, in the ear av Justice Jameson. An' he would be pleased to listen, once I had begun my little spache. I'm thinkin' he would reconsider his verdict—no?"

Violently the boy shook his head.

"No," he refused. "No—no!"

"Ye helped thim to get clear," Hanlon persisted. "They are gintlemin, and their repitations would not stand the strain av an occurrence such as last night's. Ye helped thim win free, and so, like gintlemin, they've stood by ye and shouldered their bit av the throuble—like hell they have!"

"I'd have got it, anyhow, sooner or later." Jimmy had meant to argue no more, but he tried to make his point. "It isn't that I don't know how easy it would be to—to fix it up. But that's all it would be—just fixed!" His thin face flamed. "I don't want to stay, that's all. I'm not running away, either, because I don't dare stay, because some day I'm coming back. But now——"

"Not because ye don't dare stay," Hanlon echoed gravely. And he rose and dropped an arm about the boy's shoulders. "I'm thinkin' I understand. 'Tis action wan requires in anny game, an' if livin' ain't

a game, what is it? Ye're grinnin', are ye? Praise God, 'tis yere crooked smile wance more. I'm sorry—I'll miss ye—I had need av ye here. But I'll leave the latch-string out 'gainst yer return. Is there—would ye now be afther allowin' me to——"

'And in truth now the boy was smiling, for Hanlon's self-consciousness was a painful, purple thing.

"Even you haven't the face to say it," Jimmy railed at him unsteadily. "I dare you offer to lend me money!"

"I am a bad man," Hanlon made reply irrelevantly. "Everybody who enjoys a better repitation says so. And ye have a criminal record! Look at me, lad! Will ye take twenty—just twenty?"

Jimmy shook his head.

"Ten?"

'Again an almost gleeful refusal.

"Five?"

Hanlon gave it up.

"I could wish that ye'd come to cruel starvation," he mourned, "but for the hungry look av ye at this instant."

They stood a moment, awkward and sentiment-shy. Then the boy reached out his hand, and Pegleg's gnarled fist shot out and swallowed it.

"I'll leave my baggage," Jimmy smiled defiantly over the ancient quib. "I'm in arrears, you know."

Hanlon could not answer. Angrily he tried to clear his husky throat. But the boy turned back from

the doorway, after the older man thought he had gone, and fumbled in his pocket. He brought out the two-dollar bill, folded to a knife-edge crease—his calamity fund which he carried in his waistcoat pocket.

“‘The Satin Slipper’ that opens here next week . . . Dave Landis’ daughter . . .” His explanation, begun carefully enough, went totally to pieces. Yet Hanlon understood.

“I would have done it for ye, gladly, but I know ye’d have it no other way than this.” And he accepted the money.

Jimmy nodded.

“Roses,” he hesitated. “Red roses. I think—would be—best. You’ll not be able to buy many—so maybe just one, with a long stem——

“I’ll care for it for ye,” said Hanlon.

And then the boy found the door and blundered through. Main Street was deserted at that hour, as was the broad thoroughfare which led from it to the Union Station beyond the square. The boy kept his eyes before him and hurried as he went. He never knew just when the yellow Airedale joined him. Jimmy had reached the network of tracks; a freight had hissed up to the water-tank and was drinking thirstily when Oh Boy licked his hand. At that moment Jimmy found it hardest to smile.

“Back, Oh Boy,” he ordered the dog, who was himself a wanderer. “Back home, Oh Boy!” But

he was down in the cinders the next breath, straining the lean and bristly body against him. And he swayed as he rose and dusted his shiny blue serge mechanically with one hand.

An accommodating brakeman, recognizing him, turned his head while Jimmy swung himself through the door of an empty box-car. The Airedale stood and watched, head on one side, one ear cocked hopefully, until the caboose was only a blur on the horizon. Then he turned and trotted soberly back up the street.

CHAPTER XI

WARCHESTER'S OWN DAUGHTER

SINCE no one witnessed the boy's departure, it could be described only as a fact which had come to pass; and this the *Gazette* did through the able sentences of Mr. Wainwright. And his announcement, bald and brief and unequivocal though it was, that Justice Jameson's behest had been obeyed, was welcome, indeed, to one reader who had been waiting, sick with apprehension, for the sequel of that account which detailed the boy's arrest.

But Carol Landis did not think to burn with shame for him; any ignominious side which the occurrence might have seemed to possess failed to occur to her. And when Pegleg Hanlon, several hours after Jimmy's going that morning, saw the girl watching the hotel entrance from the mouth of the alley, he joined her before the Palace Theater stage-door, uncertain just what to say. The next moment he was thankful and more than a little surprised to hear her express gladness when he had admitted, reluctantly, that Jimmy had gone.

She asked quite simply if the boy had had any plans; she asked if he had spoken of returning, and that was all. But Pegleg remembered the brave bob

of her head, and the quaintly wistful smile with which she left him when he was buying the rose, as Jimmy had requested, the night the "Satin Slipper" opened. That purchase he made out of his own pocket, tucking away the sharply creased two-dollar bill for safe-keeping, with a whimsical thought for a use to which he might some day put it.

A few days later a little figure in a mad costume of black gasped at the mass of flowers which they brought to her at the fall of the last act curtain. For Pegleg, contemplating the one rose, had suddenly found it insufficient. But it was over the single red bud, upon which he had spent much care in selection, that she cried at the train; the manager and the principals of the "Satin Slipper," knowing nothing of this solitary message or the local catastrophe, which would not have scandalized half as much as it would have amused them, tried to comfort her whom they knew only as an earnest, hungry-eyed, red-haired, small person; third from the end, front row, chorus.

They thought that she was homesick; they told her she would soon get used to it. And later she cried herself to sleep.

Of Carol Landis's career there was decidedly more report in the years that followed, in spite of the fact that her departure was not dignified by even so much as adverse mention. It was Justice Jameson's son, Lloyd, who brought back to Warchester the first really tangible news of her progress, though Wain-

wright himself, coming across a three-line announcement in a theatrical weekly that a new recruit for the dramatic had been drafted from the ranks of musical comedy, faithfully passed it on to his strictly local audience, in a paragraph commendatory or facetiously caustic, as one cared to view it. Mr. Wainwright's actual intent was veiled, but the report which Lloyd Jameson brought back with him some four years later from New York was anything but uncertain of import. To the contrary, it was so glowing and incoherent a tribute that it fell little short of overreaching itself.

In four years Lloyd's enthusiastic transfer of his favor from one pulchritudinous member of the opposite sex to another had become an occurrence of periodic regularity; so there were those who set down his rapt account of Miss Carol Landis's first Broadway appearance to his admitted weakness—a harmless outbreak, but as visible to the naked eye as a summer rash. Of the work she did in her rôle he had little to say—even less concerning the play itself. "Just the same old stuff," was the way he dismissed inquiries in that direction, "but wonderfully staged, of course. Hardy's a wizard at staging anything."

He went into detail, however, without being urged, in describing the transformation which had taken place in old Dave Landis's daughter. "Spun copper" he used oftenest in speaking of her hair; and he

dwelt so eloquently upon the beauty of her other features, which they had all overlooked in former days, that his welcome at the Sunday evening gatherings, which were still a weekly event upon the Latham front veranda, became noticeably cooler, especially on the part of that portion of his audience which listened in polite boredom and remarked that much could be done with make-up.

This observation, in the nature of a retort courteous, was largely responsible for a cynical note which crept into the utterances of the young gentleman in question about that time, whenever he spoke of women in the abstract. But one result he had achieved which the canniest press-agent would have watched with frankest envy. And when, bearing out Lloyd's fervid prophecy, which he fell back upon whenever they drove him to the defensive, metropolitan newspapers and magazines—devoted to the "profession"—began to mention the work of an "eager-eyed young lady with red hair who, in the part of *Intoxication* in Carl Hardy's sweeping morality play, 'Wisdom,' stood head and shoulders above the rest of the cast," theatrical patrons in Warchester (those who followed the drama with an eye to the critical, as well as those who bought seats merely to be amused) read every word with avidity. They waited, as patiently as they were able, for the day when "Wisdom" should come to town.

The play needed no advance advertising when the

billboards announced its engagement for the week following the Holidays. Indeed, the probable influence which the play might exert upon local minds and morals had so usurped the center of the stage that little else of importance was discussed at all during the two weeks which preceded its initial performance in the old Palace Theater burlesque house.

As the president and moving spirit of the Reform League (the society which, molding those of uncertain opinion, had helped to place T. Elihu Banks in the mayor's office four years in succession, the Reverend Watson Duncan gave the matter much private thought and a deal of public mention. From a mere dramatic performance, scheduled to lay over there the leanest week in the season, under Mr. Duncan's agitation, "Wisdom" took on the guise of a grave crisis, until there were many who professed a doubt in the virtue of any public preachment, dramatic or otherwise, which featured as delightful the work of any artist in such a rôle as *Intoxication*.

While Mr. Duncan himself was reputed ultra-advanced, insofar as theological matters were concerned, he still clung to the belief that there was nothing to be gained by admitting that vice had its bright sides. When dealing with all such matters his language was drab and his premonition of a future state still drabber. And finally convinced that the production was likely to offend the finer sensibilities

and prove an affront to every established idea of decency, the town set a record for an advance sale of tickets which, until then, had never been equaled. Every seat in the house sold out three days before the company's arrival.

At the Sunday morning service in St. Luke's, the rector alone failed to guess the identity of the girl with bronze-tinted hair who occupied a back pew with David Landis. On the face of it that would seem an incredible thing, for the buzz which followed her entrance should have apprised him of her identity, and she had been much in his mind. But her costume, black from hat and muffling fur to the low pumps, which seemed totally inadequate for a Warchester winter, resembled in no way the costume which the Reverend Mr. Duncan had imagined a widely advertised actress of insidious rôles would wear. And he overlooked her father entirely—everybody overlooked old Dave Landis.

That morning Mr. Duncan spoke feelingly; partly because the subject which he had chosen lay close to him; partly because the wistful attention in this charming stranger's gray eyes led him to believe that his words were awakening in her a response born of experience. He saw her nod, ever so little, and smile as he announced that his evening discourse would be an intimate and practical application of the morning's sermon to the present-day influence of the theater, She was still smiling when she stepped up to him in

the vestibule and held out a slim, gloved hand.

The older members of St. Luke's congregation had already passed out into the brilliant winter sunshine. But in the slim girl's neighborhood there was an excess of youthfully effusive exclamation, and cooing, Sabbath mirth. Once they had ignored Carol Landis's presence with less elaborate effort—in fact, with no effort at all. Now, wishing inordinately to be the first to establish a claim to childhood acquaintance, that effort served only to draw attention to a common uncertainty as to the best way to go about it. Even Lloyd Jameson, who had resolved during the sermon that the man who outstripped him in reaching her side would have to move rapidly indeed, found that his initiative had deserted him when the moment for action came. Yet, all and all, it was a moment of triumph for Lloyd. For every anxious, backward look of the rest he had a glance of challenge. There was a swagger in his bearing the rest of the day which seemed to say—I told you so.

Carol Landis alone remained outwardly unaware of the stir which she herself was creating. She gave her attention entirely to the old man beside her until the rector appeared. But her nod of greeting to him was so intimately eager that Mr. Duncan grew a trifle blank and dismayed.

"You don't remember me!" she accused him. And then Mr. Duncan remembered. At her delighted peal of laughter the rector of St. Luke's, little given

to levity, could not but see the charming humor of such a preposterous statement.

"But I do, my dear young lady," he made haste to reply. "Any man who could ever forget you——" His face became florid as he finished the implication with a bow— "You are little Miss Landis, of course."

In a way, it was a remarkable reply. In every way it was different from what the Reverend Watson Duncan had imagined it would be, yet now he was the first to laugh. And her quick enjoyment convinced him instantly that he had said a very clever thing.

With the eyes of his congregation upon him, the Reverend Watson Duncan accompanied David Landis and his daughter home to the cottage on the back street, reached by way of the path that led around the rectory and through the orchard, gaunt and gnarled and naked; nor was it commented in any quarter that he seemed to find this duty irksome.

On the way, he spoke of his naturally keen interest in the spiritual children of his congregation, while old Dave Landis strode on ahead, a quaint stiffness in his bearing. Delicately he intimated to the girl at his side how wide was the discussion which her interpretation of a doubtful rôle had stirred up, and expressed hope that she had not unwisely allowed expediency to influence her in a meritorious desire for success. This last remark, however, was interrupted by the barbed-wire fence, and when Carol had

extricated him and chided him for his male heedlessness (the reverend gentleman was never given to know how aghast had been his face while he stood with august coat-tail impaled upon a rusty barb), he cast about for a sentence to continue that lead, and found that it had somehow eluded him.

"It is very dear of you to have thought about that," the girl herself led the way back to the subject. "I—I knew you would. I thought it might—but it makes me very happy to hear you speak of it so frankly. I was afraid that many of Warchester's people—her best people—had already formed an opinion which might prove difficult to combat."

The arch of her lips was distinctly disconcerting, and, while Mr. Duncan's reply was not exactly vague, it was in no way alarmingly committal, either. One might have thought that he was trying to get his breath, and sparring for time.

"Yes, indeed," he said solemnly; "most certainly, yes."

She had led the way into the small front room and seated him with a graciousness that might have matched Evelyn Latham's coolest poise, although the chair which she proffered was a casualty risk in itself; and old Dave Landis had withdrawn with a punctilious word concerning an important editorial for the morning edition before it occurred to the Reverend Watson Duncan, with inspiring suddenness just how pleasant his duty was.

Carol tossed aside her black coat and stood a moment in blouse and short black skirt before the pier-glass, touching her hair with her finger-tips, though it was the reflection of her own sober eyes at which she gazed. Then she turned back to him with a dazzling smile.

"It was very childish of me to worry, and very absurd, wasn't it?" she laughed. "But I want to know what you think. Because I'm sure you'll be very positive in your condemnation or approval."

Thereupon Mr. Duncan placed both hands upon his knees, his fingers widespread, and leaned forward. The girl's face was very earnest, and very, very lovely. Not even the ghost of a smile lurked in the corners of her mouth.

"My dear child," he began sonorously, "it has long been a foolish custom to paint temptation in ugly colors—a dangerous one as well, for temptations, in this era, are about the most brightly garbed problems which we encounter."

And starting thus, he expounded at such length his personal impatience with so misguided a doctrine that it was a full half-hour before he came to refer to the part which she played in the morality play called "Wisdom."

"Here in the small circle, the opinion of which it is permitted me to mold at least a little," he assured her, "I mean to take advantage of this concrete example to drive home the lesson. Nor do I need to

tell you how greatly it pleases me that it is one of my own flock—to use a homely expression—who makes the opportunity possible. Warchester has been watching you, Miss Landis, ever since the day you stepped out, with your ideals and your faith in yourself, to carve out your own destiny. And Warchester will be very proud to claim you now, Miss Landis—of that you may be certain. An eager and sympathetic audience is awaiting your initial appearance to-morrow evening.”

It was a long half-hour, but Carol gave no sign that she had found it so. She listened without once taking her eyes from his face, even when he spoke of her departure from Warchester. And she bobbed her head, prettily grateful, when he had finished.

“But do you realize that you haven’t told me a single thing about anybody I used to know?” she asked, a moment later. “Usually I like to talk about myself better than any other available topic, but a little gossip is a sin for which I’ll gladly do penance later, if you’ll only let me indulge it now. Father is an atrocious letter-writer. He assured me that I’d find Warchester little changed, so I’m certain that his viewpoint is entirely too profound for me to appreciate.”

Mr. Duncan was silent for a time while he selected words which might not in any way wound this round-eyed young person who waited with her lips half parted.

"It is still a very typical, and, I hope, extremely human, community," Mr. Duncan replied. "But I cannot agree with your father's unqualified statement. It is inadequate and misleading—innocently so, to be sure. While it has maintained, personally, an unassailable reputation in the struggle, I have never ceased to regret that he has been allied against us, in our march toward finer ideals, both in a civic——"

Promptly Carol pressed both palms against her ears.

"You can't talk politics to me," she cried emphatically. "I won't listen. You are permitted to tell me who is married and who is engaged. You dare mention civic problems to me! Why, Mr. Duncan, I'm a suffragette only because I enjoy demanding things which someone tells me I mustn't have."

Once more the reverend gentleman spoke at some length. But when, with real regret, he was at last forced to admit that he had exhausted his subject, the girl lifted a pensive face.

"What a harum-scarum creature I was," she murmured. And then exclaimed in quick surprise at the incompleteness of the tale.

"Why, you've entirely neglected to tell me anything concerning the one person about whom I've been waiting and waiting to hear. You haven't said a single word about Jimmy, Mr. Duncan?"

The benign smile with which he had been watching

her glowing face was gone in a breath. In that same breath the silence in the room grew strained. For an infinitesimal second the reverend gentleman felt instinctively that he had been outrageously betrayed. The very clearness of her gaze, however, disarmed him the next instant, and convinced him of the unworthiness of such a suspicion. He tempered the reply which had sprung first to his lips.

"That is a subject which I have not mentioned, nor endured to be discussed in my presence, for many years, Miss Landis." He spoke with exceeding gravity. "But I realize what underlies your query. More than that, I am constrained to tell you how fine a thing I think such loyalty to be. Many times I have told myself that at least it is good not to have to suffer self-recrimination. And you will be glad to hear that his pride was great enough to keep him from returning to the city which was forced to cast him off."

The Reverend Watson Duncan did not see the expression which that thankful utterance provoked, for she looked quickly away. And she had mastered it, and contrived somehow a smile, before her head came up again. But the brightness of her eyes brought an awkward lump into Mr. Duncan's throat.

"I've never heard from him," she said very quietly. "But I've often wondered—somehow I thought that it would be his pride which would bring him back."

She raised a hand as he cleared his throat.

"You have been very good to sit and listen so long to my chatter. I mustn't keep you any longer. If I send you tickets for to-morrow night, you'll come, won't you?"

Mr. Duncan rose. She had mastered the art of a graceful exit. The reverend gentleman took his leave, believing that he had brought it about himself.

As he had promised, the rector of St. Luke's spoke that night upon the subject of the morality play, "Wisdom." As hinted, his remarks were in a way, sensational, but not in the way in which his congregation had expected. For Mr. Duncan's approval of one member of the cast, at least, was so unreserved that Miss Evelyn Latham, the acknowledged leader of Warchester's younger set, came to a decision concerning a question which had been occupying her mind throughout the entire day. Upon heavy monogrammed paper she wrote Miss Landis, who played the part of *Intoxication*, a decidedly informal invitation to be the guest of honor at a small tea following Saturday's matinée. And in the same mail, Ferris, the company's road manager, dispatched two box-seats to the Reverend Watson Duncan, though the demand for them was clamorous. This, he assured the house treasurer, was the least he could do, since it was Mr. Duncan who was largely responsible for that demand.

Quite in accord with the usual course of events, it

was Mr. Wainwright who echoed, Tuesday morning, the huge audience's judgment of the performance the night before. He complimented the management upon its sagacity in no longer attempting to foist upon a sane public productions which made their appeal to the grosser sensibilities, and mentioned briefly the work of the star. But the rest of an entire column was devoted to "Warchester's own daughter."

The first two items were universally skipped; everybody read the rest of the account, save the "daughter" herself. And she was too busy badgering her father about the account of the same affair which the *Courier* carried to think of the other paper. For once old Dave Landis had dipped his pen in Wainwright's fluid phraseology; and though Carol shouted in glee, and quoted his own words to his face, and called it shameless, that day was the second of the happiest week in his whole life.

Everybody had ignored him so long that he had grown accustomed to it; and now all who knew him, no matter how slightly, made it impossible for him to ignore them. Warchester, having claimed Carol Landis for its own, was seized immediately with an overwhelming desire to shake her father by the hand—in her presence, if possible; if not, then with a hope that chance would be kinder next time. And though it was not so ephemeral a thing as their belated realization of his own worth upon which his

happiness was based, the discredited old dreamer accepted it for what it was worth, and enjoyed it accordingly.

He was with his daughter almost every hour of every day; he chanced to be alone only because she was at rehearsal Saturday morning, when T. Elihu Banks stopped him before the Commonwealth Building and accosted him with ponderous jocularly. T. Elihu invariably swam with the current, when it was harmless as well as popular.

"Still pounding me, I see," he remarked, and he jabbed at a copy of the *Courier* with a fat forefinger, "—and I understand that the women folks are giving a tea for your daughter up at my house this very afternoon. Rank ingratitude, sir—rank ingratitude! I don't suppose you'll let up on me, Dave, till you're gone for good."

It was the first time in twenty years that T. Elihu had addressed him by his first name, which he appeared to use unconsciously now. That morning Main Street was treated to the sight of their great man laughing boisterously over the sally of one who, for as long a period, had never ceased to assail him.

"And maybe not then," Landis laughed back. "Maybe not then—who knows!"

T. Elihu pondered a day or two over that reply, and then forgot it, for a time. And it was T. Elihu who, early in the spring of the following year, sent the message to Carol Landis which brought her back

to Warchester a second time, the morning after news had spread like fire to every corner of the city that David Landis was dead.

T. Elihu met the girl at the station with the purple-cushioned barouche; he took upon himself every "arrangement," insofar as she would permit.

But it was Pegleg Hanlon who sat with her in the small front room of the dingy cottage, the day after the funeral, when her father's will was read.

Nobody had suspected a streak of grim humor in Dave Landis. Everybody had believed that the publication known as the *Courier* was mortgaged to T. Elihu to the last dollar of its value, until the *Courier* printed a copy of its owner's most important bequest.

Hours after that edition was carried into T. Elihu's office in the Commonwealth Building, no one dared to enter. Sundry noises, arising from time to time behind the closed door, made such a course seem inadvisable.

David Landis had left the Warchester *Courier*, title, property and good will, to "My friend and fellow-townsmen, James Gordon — my logical successor in Warchester."

CHAPTER XII

MELODY

FOR a week or two discussion of old Dave Landis's last will and testament was heard on every corner in Warchester, especially heated insofar as it concerned the one whom he had named as his principal heir and logical successor.

There were those who insisted that Jimmy was likely to turn up any morning to claim his heritage. But when the perfunctory advertisement, which had been sent broadcast throughout the land, failed to produce the wanderer, this position became logically untenable, and public interest gradually waned. Some few pointed out that the joke on T. Elihu had achieved the one big moment, anyhow—that Jimmy's return, in some state of vagabondage, could only serve as anti-climax.

And the Reverend Watson Duncan, in the same connection, quoted an apt line or two concerning the brief span of years which is the lot of those who tread the paths of pleasure.

Yet the advertisement did come to the eyes of him for whom it was meant, though not in a scene of squalor, nor any other of the highly undesirable.

picturesque fashions in which Warchester had imagined James Gordon's discovery of it.

Following the death of her father, Carol Landis went back on the road with the play called "Wisdom." (Wainwright wrote with moving eloquence upon the unsung bravery of those who wore a mask of merriment when the heart was lead.) And when, two months later, Carl Hardy watched her work from the front before the company closed, he returned to New York with his mind made up.

Two nights later, in carpet slippers and ragged smoking-jacket, he sat and smiled a welcome to the author of "Seek and Ye Shall Find," who stopped in the living-room door to grin quizzically. "Seek and Ye Shall Find" had remained a season on Broadway, and bade fair to remain there the best part of another. Locating its author was usually an entirely different matter, however, and Hardy counted it a lucky omen that his note, requesting an interview, had not found him on the opposite side of the hemisphere.

He waited until the visitor had stretched his lean length in a chair before he spoke.

"Well, I'm ready," he began then, with a kind of repressed abruptness, "I'm ready! What about you?"

Plainly the question had to do with a subject which they had discussed until it had become a familiar one.

"His Own Home Town?" the other asked, and his quizzical grin disappeared.

Hardy nodded his head emphatically.

"Anybody in particular in mind for the lead?"

Again the emphatic nod.

"Landis!" snapped the producer.

And the taller, thinner man was so long silent, staring into the empty fireplace before him, that Hardy finally found it no longer possible to hide his enthusiasm.

"Man," he cried, "if you can only get a finish for that first act! If you can only take that boy, as you've conceived him, carry him back to the town that turned him out—keep it all logical!—keep it just simple!—and dirt-mean!—and splendid—and oh, just so damned convincing that one would have to believe that it had all really happened—!" he broke off, laughing self-consciously at his own outburst—"Well, she can handle the girl's part. I've watched her, and I know. What do you think?"

The younger man might have been talking to himself when he made answer.

"Just as though it had all really happened," he murmured; and then his head swung up. "Of course—and why not? I'll try it, Hardy. I'll see what I can do?"

Two days later, Jimmy Gordon, T. Elihu's good-for-nothing nephew, turned up again in the haunts of his youth.

Spring had given way to early summer. There was a drowsy hum in the air and a heavy scent of hyacinths upon the puff of wind which blew across the Common. Seated upon the veranda of the Bay State Hotel a plump traveling man—better known to the trade as a “drummer”—sniffed and then breathed deeply of it. He had been forced to forego his jump to Providence and lay over there Sunday, because he dared not leave town without seeing Latham, of the Construction Company—J. J. Latham—personally, before he went. So one would reasonably have expected him to find nothing of excellence on the scene of his broken schedule. To the contrary, his straw hat tilted back at a dangerous angle, quill toothpick—relic of an early breakfast—protruding comfortably from one corner of his mouth, he voiced aloud his unqualified content to the intrepid pair which formed the martial statue in the center of the Common—a gunner and his mate.

“Me, too, boys,” he muttered. “I’m with you. I’d just as soon fight it out on these lines if it took all summer.”

Mr. Dodge, the hotel proprietor, behind the desk inside, hearing the sound of his voice, promptly crossed to the open doorway. But any question which he might have asked was cut short by the arrival of the eight o’clock express, which thundered into Warchester’s dingy station-shed at that moment. Mr. Dodge gave his attention to the straggling knot of

arrivals, who hurried off uptown; and the drummer continued to contemplate the gunner and his mate, for his distaste for Mr. Dodge's society was as great as Mr. Dodge's disapproval and distrust of him, until the hotel proprietor's gasp of astonishment forced his attention.

Mr. Dodge was staring with his mouth wide open.

"What is it, a fire?" the drummer demanded truculently; and then, catching sight of the figure on the station platform at which the proprietor was gazing so fixedly, his round face became suddenly cherubic.

It was the drummer's boast that he never forgot a name or a face, and he had more than one good reason for remembering that tall, lean, thin-nosed figure in blue serge who stood gazing up Front Street, oblivious to everything but his own thoughts. 'Aimless would not have described him with exactitude, and yet he seemed amiably unconscious of the stunned regard of Mr. Dodge.

The drummer wheeled toward that dumfounded individual.

"Who's your friend?" he inquired with exceeding softness.

Mr. Dodge turned with a sort of hypnotic stiffness of neck. Mr. Dodge suggested a man who, having gazed upon an apparition, was trying to convince himself that he did not believe in the supernatural, and achieving an indifferent success.

"He's no friend of mine," he retorted mechanically, "nor of anybody else in this town. That—by Judas, that *is him!*—that's Jimmy Gordon come back again, just when we was beginning to think he was gone for good."

"Hum-m-m," murmured the drummer; "hum-m-m." And then, most ingenuously: "I wonder where's the dog?"

But this doubtful witticism missed its mark. Once certain that his eyes were not betraying him, the Bay State proprietor moved to the head of the steps, the better to view the lean figure's passage up Front Street. And little by little his smile waxed malignantly pleased.

"Look at that suit, will you?" he called attention to the garments, which, in truth, were far from new, "and that old felt hat and bag. Don't look to me like he had found a gold-mine since he went away. Well, if he's come back to this city expecting somebody to give him a lift, it won't take him long to find out how much of a mistake he's made. I—I wish I could be around to see T. Elihu's face when he finds out he's back."

The drummer ignored that devoutly expressed desire. He had been considering the prodigal's garb, even before Mr. Dodge called attention to it.

"Nothing flash," he mused agreeably, "but—but it struck me that they looked as if they might have been made for him." He addressed his question directly

to the host: "How long did you say he's been away?"

"Upward of six years." Mr. Dodge's calculation was as hasty as his utterance, for Jimmy Gordon had reached the corner of Main Street and paused.

"Now watch," Mr. Dodge whispered, there was no need for caution. "Watch! A-a-a-h, didn't I tell you so? There he goes, back to Hanlon's. Once a crook—always a crook!" And he sighed deeply. "It'll certainly be mighty hard on his family," he said.

The thin figure with its familiar shoulder stoop had indeed paused at the corner, but not from indecision. He paused again at the head of the alley, and again beside the heap of discarded scenery near the stage door. And when he climbed the steps of the square brick hotel, and found Pegleg waiting for him in the doorway, he thought that Pegleg must have seen his deliberate approach, for there was no surprise, but merely grave welcome, in Hanlon's eyes.

"I was expectin' ye," Hanlon answered his laughing question, and Jimmy's laughter hushed. "I was expectin' ye. Though 'twill sound foolish when I tell ye why. Jimmy, lad, I wonder if ye would be remimberin' wan av the old burlesque crowd—but av course ye would——"

"Melody?" Quickly Jimmy anticipated him.

Hanlon nodded heavily, and led the way to the

table near the window of the larger room, which overlooked the river.

"She died last night," he explained shortly. "She's been dying for three years." But with his next words he had gone back through the years to that last morning when they had sat there together. "Ten days they gave her," he went on, "but 'twas not the servin' av them that made the change in her, for no matter how she changed in other ways—and I've never known man or woman so altered in so little time—she never stopped hatin' thim.

"She gave up her job in the Palace. She stuck to her room day and night, exceptin' when she came down to meals. And it was a week before I learned what she was doin'. Are ye remimberin' the old writin' machine ye left to cover certain arrears in board?"

Jimmy smiled and bowed his head.

"She was learnin' the manipulation av that," Pegleg told him, "and certain pothooks she made by the ream. She spoke no explanation, mind you, and I nor no one else questioned her, for though her voice had become quiet, the black eyes av her never grew any meeker. Three months there was av that, and then she set out walkin' the streets, lookin' for a job."

Hanlon stopped there a moment. The expression on Jimmy's face baffled him. The quiet man seemed very like the taciturn boy whom he had known, and

yet there was a different quality behind his silence.

"Can ye imagine her lookin' for a job in this town?" he went on. "Can ye imagine what it would be like if—if ye were to try that thing? Then ye can picture well enough, can't ye, the reception she got? Some av thim wouldn't let her inside their offices—they shut the doors in her face. And others, well, they smiled, knowin' like, and thim she left before they'd had a chance to speak.

"But she kept at it a week, or maybe two. And then I did what I'd have done at first had I been thinkin' instead av feelin' sorry for her. I tipped off Bauman that he needed a stenographer bad, and he offered her a job. 'Twas too late then, av course. She just laughed; she knew that Bauman was my man. She told him she'd decided the work was too confinin', anyhow. Two days later she cleaned up the machine until it was bright as a new penny, and quit town.

"She come back two weeks ago, lad, and nobody with eyes needed to think she'd been makin' her livin' runnin' a typewriter. I found her on the street myself, out in front av the Palace. She didn't seem to remimber very much clearly, but she knew me. And she was thin! Afther just wan look at the color in her cheeks, I didn't have to ask questions. I knew—oh, I knew well enough!

"She said she'd come back to explain to Judge Jameson just how it all had happened. Ye see, she'd

forgotten some five years or so—forgotten them completely—and that was merciful—was it not? She had to put Jameson right, else they'd be chasin' you out of the city; and I promised her that if she'd wait until mornin' I'd go with her, for that was the only way I could persuade her to rest at all.

"And then—then, next mornin' she'd forgotten that. She was talkin' av places and people, and cool water and green hills—things that she'd known before ever we knew her. And that—that was the way she died last night. She just walked out over the hills, Jimmy, into the mornin'.

"The doctors called it delirium, but who are they, that they should be so sure? 'Tell Mr. Gordon about the lilies of the valley,' she said to me, easy and sure and content. 'I like them best. He'll take care of everything.' And there she lay, smilin' up at me, knowin' and glad that she was to go. 'I want it to be just like other girls. I wish I could wait till he gets back. I wish I could tell him I didn't stop to think that it would cause him trouble. But I can't—I've never been so tired in all my life—' "

The waiter with the expressionless face and the patch of white apron across his thighs had cleared the table between them long before Pegleg finished.

The older man sat watching the kindly smile which hovered over Jimmy's lips after he was through.

"She wondered," he hesitated, "if 'twould be too

much to ask." And suddenly he was wondering how much of the boy was left in the man before him. "I'm thinkin' I could care for it all meself, if—if——"

Jimmy rose and moved to the window. Until then Hanlon had not noticed that the boy's hair was streaked gray as his own behind the temples.

"I'll be back in a little while," said Jimmy, slowly. "You can buy a plot—with money. I'll be back in a little while."

The news spread swiftly that morning, and since it is an axiom that bad news always does, it is to be assumed that Warchester looked upon James Gordon's homecoming as anything but good tidings. As yet, it had not reached the white cottage near the Latham hedge when Jimmy turned his face toward that district which lay up on the hill.

The Reverend Watson Duncan was busy in his study; Mrs. Duncan had breakfasted in bed, and the maid who answered the bell was uncertain, but she ushered the visitor in.

Mr. Dodge's recognition of the wanderer had been a thing of degrees, though more or less voluble. Mr. Duncan recognized his step-son instantly, but he did not speak at all. Jimmy made no move to seat himself, yet his was the greater ease.

"I'm sorry," the old drawling note of apology was uppermost, "I'm sorry to interrupt."

Mr. Duncan maintained a stony silence. He had

changed but little since Jimmy last had seen him; his parishioners still took pride in their dapper shepherd. Standing before the desk, with its orderly litter, as simply as a stranger might have done it, and as impersonally, Jimmy repeated Pegleg Hanlon's story, but he knew before he began that a stranger would have had a better chance of success. Yet his voice remained grave and somehow gentle. His very quietness goaded Mr. Duncan to speech.

"Do I infer correctly," he demanded, "that you are requesting me to preach this woman's funeral service?"

When he left Hanlon's place Jimmy had been uncertain. He told himself he wanted to be sure.

"I thought perhaps you would," he said, "if you were to understand——" But he was sure now. He made a gesture, stiff and singularly hopeless.

And the reverend gentleman beat upon the table with his fist.

"I understand, all too well," he replied, and his voice was edged. "Young man, it is you yourself who lacks understanding of just what you request. Six years ago you were allowed to depart from this community without the stigma which a well-merited punishment would have left upon you. What your life has been in the interim I do not know, nor is it material in this matter. But I tell you that you will find your situation again intolerable if you mean, as your conduct would indicate, to remain here and

resume your former associations. What you have asked is an affront to me, and to society, which has drawn a dead-line which must be maintained. You refer to the occurrence as pitiful. I can only reply yours is a perverted point of view. If that is all, then you'll excuse me, I am sure."

Jimmy Gordon found his way outside. He stumbled a little blindly on the threshold, and as he turned down the street he heard a gasp behind the drawn curtains of an upstairs window. Until that instant it had not occurred to him to inquire concerning the state of his mother's health.

Four times that morning he rang other clergymen's bells. Four time he repeated, more and more briefly, the request which he had carried first to his stepfather. In each instance his appearance occasioned vast surprise and some little consternation until he admitted that he had already seen Mr. Duncan. Thereupon, unfailingly, there ensued a relieved reference to Mr. Duncan's seniority, and a polite but final refusal.

Jimmy's voice became quieter with failure, his manner more and more apologetic. He gave up when he had exhausted those four possibilities. And he scarcely saw the barouche with the plum-colored cushions which swept past him as he rounded the corner into Main Street, clanging now and cluttered with traffic. But T. Elihu Banks saw him. The Reverend Watson Duncan was riding at Mr. Banks's

side. And the face of the town's great man was a deeper purple than the cushions upon which he sat.

Again Pegleg and Jimmy sought the table in the window.

"I should have known better," Jimmy's voice was hard. "I would have let you go, only I thought I might be mistaken, after all. I thought perhaps—"

Pegleg cut him short with savage abruptness.

"—An' I would have," he shot back. "I would have, without your suggestin' it, only I wanted you to learn firsthand something which ye would not have believed, had I told it to you six years ago. You were always sure that 'twas yourself that was the wrong wan. And for six years ye've been Heaven knows where, but ye seem not to have learned yer lesson. Pfah! 'Tis a Christian and charitable and forgivin' community, is it not, that could not risk the burial av wan child without fearin' defilement? Ye'd not have listened to me. Now open yer eyes and look about ye. This is your own home town! Ye can go now and see about the flowers."

The dreariness was gone from Jimmy's face when he returned a second time. And Pegleg was waiting for him with a huge car at the head of the alley. Pegleg handled the wheel like a mariner accustomed to vast expanses in which to navigate, and almost immediately they left the dust of the city behind them for the cleaner dirt road of the country. As they passed the cemetery, high on a ridge, Hanlon jerked

his thumb toward its highest knoll, cut by the dirt of a new trench.

Ten miles out of town, at a crossroads chapel, the machine was stopped. Hanlon shouted to the man who was hoeing in the garden behind a house on the opposite side of the highway. The shirt-sleeved one seemed to know Hanlon and, stranger still, to value his friendship.

"At ten-thirty," he promised gravely, when Pegleg had told him their need.

Back at Hanlon's, when he went upstairs to the room which had been his once before for a brief tenancy, Jimmy found Abel Thompson busy unpacking a trunk and smoothing out his clothes. True to the dramatic instinct of his race, Abel wore a heavy air of mourning, though this had not prevented him from noticing both the quality and cut of Jimmy's wardrobe. He was shaking out a suit of homespun with much admiration when Jimmy entered.

"Afternoon, seh," Abel greeted him. "Afternoon, Mist' Gordon. Jes' layin' out your things, seh. If they's anything wrong, bet' jes' tell me at first, seh. Somethin' nice and quiet and da'k-colored, I s'pose, seh, foh to-morrow."

Jimmy thanked him abstractedly. He was thinking about his legacy, title, property and good-will, of which Hanlon had apprised him on the ride into the country. At the time he scarcely noticed the

subdued quality of Abel's greeting, which he would have laid to the need for "something quiet" under the circumstances. Later, he realized that Abel had in that moment announced himself as general man and valet, a position which he continued to fill in the days that followed.

They buried the girl known as Melody the next morning, from the large room downstairs. Jimmy sat far to the back during the service, his eyes upon the face of Blair, the young minister. He nodded to many who entered and gave him an uncertain nod of greeting; and then, little by little, he forgot entirely the odd crowd that filled the room.

Blair spoke briefly, quietly, and with little gesture. He did not preach at all; he just talked—talked simply. "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to cast a stone," he read from the Bible before him, and then he closed the book to tell them how little of real hopelessness there was in their world, how much of simple honesty and fairness and honor.

Listening, Jimmy forgot even himself. Nothing remained definite except the voice of the speaker and an intolerable ache in his own throat. They had finished singing—that motley crowd of men who had come in celluloid collars and bunchy coats, and women with faces startlingly innocent of color—they had filed out, and Jimmy was still standing, marveling at the tenseness of those voices in song, when a hand

touched his shoulder, and he turned slowly around.

He knew her at the touch, even before he wheeled. He stood and gazed, without knowing how white and strained were his lips, upon the infinite compassion in Carol Landis's face. And suddenly he found his mouth too dry for words.

The pressure of her hand upon his shoulder drew him to the aisle.

"I want to go in your carriage, Jimmy," she murmured, "if I may."

And Warchester, at noon that day, knew a sensation even greater than the passing of the girl called Melody. They saw Jimmy Gordon bring "their own Miss Landis" back to the cottage at the foot of the orchard, in a decrepit public hack, after the funeral. They noted that she leaned toward him and laughed and chattered, and seemed to find great interest in his plainly embarrassed replies. Once she put a hand over the long, thin one which lay between them on the broken upholstery—that happened just as T. Elihu Banks chanced again to pass, with a deep bow for her and a flourish.

Jimmy took her home. The rest of the afternoon he sat on an iron bench in the stone court behind Pegleg Hanlon's place—the bench nearest the sluggish, oil-besmeared river. And Hanlon saw him still there, motionless, when he came downstairs in the morning. More than that, he found Abel Thompson, the gentleman of color, head bowed on

the sill, asleep at the window which overlooked the court.

Abel he shook awake, but the latter became evasive to a degree at the first question.

"I dunno what I'se doin' heah," he replied airily. "Jes'—jes' settin', I guess, and kinda full asleep."

Hanlon's eyes were keen. At that moment he saw Jimmy pick up a fragment of concrete and toss it far out into the water, but there was nothing of discouragement in the action.

"There wasn't any need of it," Hanlon said gruffly. "Don't you know I'd have been watchin' if there had been? Go down and tell Tivotson to get around to his office—tell him Gordon's in town."

Abel's black face shone again with its accustomed depth of color. Immediately he rose and went to carry out the order. And Hanlon was waiting unconcernedly when Jimmy came in at eight.

"I wonder where I can find Tivotson?" the latter asked, without preamble. "I want to talk things over with him. Yesterday's edition, and I only glanced at it, was about the worst thing that ever came out of a press."

A pulse of triumph shot across Hanlon's face. His grip crushed the slighter man's shoulders.

"You're goin' to stick," he roared. "You're goin' to stick! Now, by God, we'll show thim some civic reform."

Abel, that morning, proved himself capable of

greater speed than anyone hitherto had been led to believe was in him. He found Tivotson and delivered his message with a crispness that left that soiled and unshaven city editor speechless. On his way back he paused at the front of the Palace Theater to tender his resignation. There was only one attaché about at that hour, one of Abel's own assistants, a razor-back, but Abel, nevertheless, discharged the formality with considerable pomp and a shade of mystery.

"I'm affiliatin' m'self with one of our risin' young business men," was all he deigned to explain; and he had the homespun laid out when Jimmy Gordon finished his shaving.

Abel suggested a carnation for the buttonhole and chuckled as Jimmy, rather blankly, refused. And then, in spite of the fact that he must needs go by a longer way around, Abel outstripped his employer, and arrived first at the disreputable block which housed the *Courier*. And he had finished scrubbing the uneven boards of the lower hallway and the stairs before T. Elihu Banks arrived that morning.

Abel noted that T. Elihu breathed hard as he conducted him up the flight to the door of the editorial rooms, and ushered him in. It was a half-hour before the gentleman of color came out of his resultant trance and remembered the pail downstairs.

CHAPTER XIII

TIVOTSON

IF Jimmy Gordon had entertained high hopes concerning the financial or physical state of his heritage, the *Courier*, the first half-hour spent in the editorial room with Tivotson would have dispelled them, just as effectually as did his first sight of the room itself convince him that, for the moment, the premises were in far greater need of Abel Thompson's mop and pail than all the brilliance which the pen of a journalist new-fired with zeal might be supposed to bring.

Tivotson, the "city editor," had preceded the new owner of the paper by only a matter of minutes that morning, and Jimmy found him gazing aimlessly about the littered room, obviously struck for the first time in months by its mad confusion, and worried in a half-sober, wholly lugubrious way by the cobwebs and dust and dirt. He greeted the new proprietor's entrance in a manner just as uncertain, for he kept his bloodshot eyes furtively averted and made no move toward offering his hand. Tivotson's opinion of his own stewardship for many years had not been large, but the realization of his neglect, suddenly forced upon his notice, twenty-four hours before he

had achieved his usual weekly sobriety, appalled him.

"We're a little upset here this morning, Mr. Gordon," he husked from a dry throat. We weren't looking for you, just at present."

Jimmy closed the door and followed his city editor's gaze about the room. It occurred to him that Tivotson was stating the case mildly—there was scarcely a foot of floor or wall that was clean—but he found more to interest him in the little, shambling figure before him than he did in the heaped-up débris.

"A little soap and water, Tivotson," he laughed softly, "and we'll work a miracle." He stopped to gaze absently at the other's hawklike face. "And perhaps that'll serve just as well, for a time," he went on, musingly. "Because we know we can achieve cleanliness, and—and I'm afraid that it'll be quite a long time before we can convince a good many that godliness is not beyond us, eh?"

The slow question, tinged with whimsical humor, brought Tivotson's head up in spite of him. Besides Abel Thompson, who temperamentally was unfitted to accept Jimmy's return as anything but a triumphant reentry of the city of his youth, Tivotson was perhaps the only soul in the town who had been fitted by circumstance to sense the change that eight years had wrought in the returned prodigal. Tivotson's descent had been slow, and correspondingly sure. Eight years before he, too,

had prophesied dire things for Jimmy Gordon; now he flushed painfully, when he found the latter smiling down at him in a fashion as fraternal as the spirit of his words. It was a long time since any one had held out a hand to Tivotson, except casually now and then, to prevent him from stumbling and fetching up in the gutter, which as a general rule ultimately proved his destination anyhow.

Tivotson flushed, and shook hands. And Jimmy, noting how hard he tried to control his twitching lids and stiffen his slack shoulders, gave no sign that he saw. Instead he cleared a space on a desk, one that overlooked the upper end of Front Street, seated himself and motioned the little man to a place behind what was plainly the city editor's table.

"Our first conference, Tivotson," he laughed again, and tilted his lean length far back in his chair. "Now, what are our precepts and policies?"

At that abrupt question Tivotson's none too tight mouth fell open, until he was made aware, this time by the light in his employer's eyes, that again the latter spoke lightly and with facetious intent. Thereupon he, too, seemed to find in the situation something at which to be amused, though his amusement was grimmer by far.

"Total and eternal damnation," he made answer. "Having been damned, without reservation or hope of redemption, since the beginning of the book, we

damn, with equally cheerful unanimity, the works of those who reap the rewards of righteousness."

But instead of laughing, Jimmy only smiled ever so quietly as he gave that answer a moment of thought. Tivotson's hot eyes were upon him questioningly when he looked up, grave of a sudden.

"Believe in this sweeping damnation, as you term it, Tivotson?" he asked musingly.

Tivotson sat and stared hard at his superior. It was eight years since old Dave Landis had occupied that chair, eight years since good-for-nothing Jimmy Gordon had been driven out of town by the weight of public opinion. And while there was a change in him, hard to define but very certain, in that moment Tivotson found the boy's mildness unaltered.

"I believe in my own," he startled himself by the words. Then he gave way to a singularly hopeless gesture. "When a whole town has been telling you that you're no good, for as long as you can remember, you have to believe finally, don't you?"

Jimmy spent some time over the process of firing a cigarette.

"Do you?" he asked then, very quietly. "That's what I've been wondering—or does it, sometimes, depend upon the town, as well as the individual? Because I was almost convinced, eight years ago, Tivotson, just as you are almost convinced now. Almost, I put it, do you understand? Yet there's one fine thing about being at the bottom of a well,

Tivotson. One can't fall any farther." He paused and seemed to treat his next words inconsequentially. "May I have a look at the records, if you have any available? I'd like to know just how badly things stand."

For a moment Tivotson did not move. He sat with his lips moving wordlessly, as if repeating the other's words in a desperate effort to be sure of their meaning. Then he rose and with a wry smile brought a list of paid-in subscribers, and a statement of accounts payable and bills due. The latter Jimmy laid aside after a brief scrutiny; he knew that Pegleg was a business man. And he had picked up the record sheet of subscribers to whom the *Courier* was delivered each day, his own expression had waxed lugubrious in the extreme at its leanness, when T. Elihu Banks, ushered up-stairs by Abel, appeared that morning in the doorway. So it was coincidence as trivial as that which established the key of an interview which was to prove epochal in Warchester's history.

For T. Elihu, as he padded across the threshold, was quick to see that look of concerned incredulity and faint dismay, and it was not unlike him to lay it entirely to the unexpected honor of his presence. Indeed, it helped to clear his own face of a heaviness as close akin to anxiety as he ever permitted himself to exhibit in public. Jimmy Gordon, the town's returned reprobate looked somewhat aghast. The

town's great man permitted himself to smile. But there was real reason for astonishment in the quality of the latter's greeting.

"Keep your seat, young man," he boomed, as Jimmy made to rise. "Keep your seat. A busy man can't spend half his time jumping up, whenever ever" Tom, Dick and Harry enters his office."

But Jimmy straightened his long length and came out from behind his desk. In rising he made it very easy for T. Elihu to see that his tweeds, while not unnecessarily shabby, were nevertheless lacking in that spruce newness which was typical of Warchester's younger business men who had achieved success, and advertised it personally. And it seems inconceivable that T. Elihu could have failed to notice, for his gaze, which darted from point to point, was all embracing. Yet T. Elihu was holding out a hand, again to Tivotson's unutterable amazement. Jimmy swept the room with a brief gesture, and in that instant his manner was falteringly apologetic—that old, old air of perpetual apology which until then had escaped Tivotson and vaguely baffled him. Then the prodigal was shaking hands with the town's great man. T. Elihu covered the boy's hand with his free, left palm.

"We're very badly unsettled here, just at present, Mr. Banks," he repeated Tivotson's apology. But there he dared to smile uncertainly.

"I find if one leans against anything, one acquires

immediately a veneer of cobwebs and whitewash. And in asking you to be seated, I beg that you exercise some care. The furniture is not to be trusted."

T. Elihu paid so little attention to this levity that it is very possible that he did not hear it at all. Instead, he stood frowning fiercely into the boy's thin and familiar face, searching it keenly, yet with a ponderous good-nature, for the fierceness was feigned.

"So you've come back again, have you, young man!" He finally shot the words out. "Back to Warchester! Any objection to my asking why?"

At that point Jimmy grew conscious of the fact that T. Elihu had not released his hand, and displayed no symptom that he might do so, in the next moment or two. And suddenly the thin face turned red.

"I'm afraid," he hesitated, "in view of the fashion in which I left it, the only answer possible is obvious to you. I went away, you'll remember—well, under a cloud is the phrase, isn't it?" His smile was quickly disarming. "And it's my own home town, you know, after all—so——"

T. Elihu gave the imprisoned hand a spasmodic shake clearly indicative of supreme satisfaction, and sought a chair.

"Thought so," he growled. "Thought so! Sit down—sit down!" And, after he had drawn up nearer the desk: "I want to talk to you, sir—plainly,

sir, I am a plain man. That's what I dropped in for, and if you've any objections—well, you're a nephew of mine, young man, and one has to be more or less charitable toward one's presumptuous relatives."

Astonishment flickered in Jimmy Gordon's eyes at this further peculiarity. He caught it mirrored upon the visage of Tivotson, who sat like a man turned to stone. And then he was smiling again, his thin, not very mirthful smile. But obediently he sat down.

"In the first place," T. Elihu's bright eyes never left Jimmy's face, "in the first place, sir, I want to tell you that yesterday you did a damned fine thing, sir. A splendid and noble thing!"

The blankness that spread across Jimmy's face was not feigned.

"I'm afraid that you've made a——" he began. T. Elihu cut him short.

"No mistake at all," he stated flatly. "None at all! Duncan told me late last evening of this unfortunate young person whose funeral you arranged, and it's that occurrence which brought me here this morning. Of course, the request which you made of your stepfather was out of the question, sir—out of the question, as you no doubt will agree, upon maturer thought. But the spirit behind your act warrants commendation, sir. You braved the opinion of an entire community to act according to your convictions. And when I know that a man has done that I need no

further credentials. Since you have already mentioned an unfortunate occurrence of some years ago, I, too, will speak of it, though such was not my intention when I entered. You made a mistake common to youth, sir—I am older than you and you will forgive my effrontery, if you find it such. You—er—chose many unfortunate associates, harmless, perhaps yet most desirable in the eyes of our——”

“I understand,” Jimmy interrupted him. “That is one of the things I hope to do. I—I owe it to myself to set myself right with our——” he barely hesitated—“with our best people.”

T. Elihu bowed profoundly.

“And in the pursuance of your enterprise here,” he ventured, “you have already decided upon a definite policy.”

Some of the perplexity went from the eyes of the new proprietor of the *Courier*. Diffidence before T. Elihu’s surpassing greatness seemed to stride upon him.

“None—yet,” he murmured. “Mr. Tivotson tells me that we have for some time been content with mechanically supplying the opposition to any question of public importance which may arise. I have no policy yet, but we’ll try, I think, to print a paper which will make as direct an appeal to the working people as the *Gazette* does to Warchester’s better classes.”

“A decidedly far-sighted view,” T. Elihu set his

seal of vast approval upon the scheme in one explosive utterance. "And now I want to tell you, sir, that when a man starts a fresh page, I am not the one to delve back through the records. The years have improved you, sir—vastly—vastly! And you have returned to Warchester at a time when opportunity never was so insistent. We shall want you with us, young man—will want you to join us—Wainwright and myself, and Willetts, and yes, even Jameson."

He held up a hand as Jimmy attempted to interrupt.

"I know," he expostulated. "You need attempt no explanation, my boy. You are a free agent; you have under your direction an instrument of publicity, the course of which you must dictate as you deem best. But there are many factions, many questions of exceeding importance with which I believe it will be advisable for you to familiarize yourself, before you act. Whenever you are free for dinner, young man, I want to talk politics with you."

T. Elihu rose heavily to his feet. The queer smile had left Jimmy's lips.

"But I——" he said.

"You're busy now," T. Elihu cut in. "You'll have more leisure presently. Come when you can."

And with that Jimmy's eyes grew quizzical.

"I'll take pleasure in doing so," he said, "—later, if you still care to have me."

In the doorway T. Elihu paused. Sufficient time had elapsed to cover any seeming connection between this next remark and his expressions of good wishes.

"You've work on your hands," he said, "and I take it, sir, that the attempted rejuvenation of this property is not exactly a sentimental or philanthropic venture on your part. If you need references, call on me." He turned to wink jovially. "I'll tell them that you're the town's lost dog come back again—but I'll put you in right. You'll be busy, but if you want a card to any of the clubs, let me know. They tell me that the young folks golf all day and dance till morning. And when you're a bit better settled—come and see me, young man."

After T. Elihu had gone, Jimmy, who had returned to his desk without a word, sat so long, lean chin in his hands, gazing blankly out of the window that Tivotson, at first too dumfounded to ask the question that was hanging upon his lips, grew thirsty with a great thirst as noon came about, until he was hard put to keep his own place behind his littered table. He dared not move while the other figure remained so silent. And yet Jimmy was aware of Tivotson's growing lack of self-control. He heard the restlessly moving feet and caught, from the corners of his eyes, glimpses of the white and harassed face. It was Tivotson about whom Jimmy was thinking most in that long period of quiet.

"I'll want you to lunch with me," he finally

addressed that shabby, small person with kindly abruptness, "with me and Pegleg Hanlon. Do you mind?"

The city editor's countenance, white and hawklike and angular, underwent a remarkable series of changes. It became furtive and cunning, and then sullen, and then openly perplexed. But he reached for his hat with some alacrity. Any company was acceptable to Tivotson at that moment, in any hostelry, if only the service promised to be prompt; and he was in no mood for analysis.

When Jimmy presented him, an unnecessary formality, to the grizzled proprietor of the hotel that stood in the hollow square, the little man's dry-lipped eagerness prevented him from noticing that Pegleg's welcome was inscrutable. He was casting about for a waiter. And he had achieved partial control of his nerves and was turning a not unamiable eye upon the food before him, when Jimmy reached in his discourse with Hanlon the question which Pegleg was waiting to hear.

"So he has made me an offer for my support, Pegleg," he said. "Now I want you to tell me why—he's been four times mayor of Warchester—tell me why he shouldn't represent us at the capital. Not personal reasons, Pegleg. How much do you know?"

Pegleg shot an uncordial glance at Tivotson, who had straightened in his chair. Then he laughed, hoarsely.

"Not personal reasons, is it?" he growled. "I mustn't complain, I nor none av the rest av us, who have tried to stay within the law. Thin I'll not, till ye learn that no man is a good citizen until he casts his vote for a personal reason. I'll tell ye instead to find where the money for the Main Street paving wint. I'll ask ye how it came about that Wainwright and Banks and Jameson came to own the acres they did, a month before the franchise for the new line to the north wint through? I'll ask ye why—" upon Pegleg's baleful face there came a look of swift recollection. "Do ye remimber wan Whitey Garritty?" he demanded. "The wan with no blood in his skin, the night——"

Jimmy nodded quickly. He was watching Tivotson while seeming to have eyes only for Hanlon, and the city editor's face was full of the keenest interest.

"He wint away the same night that ye seen fit to remove yerself," Hanlon's smile was little removed from a snarl, "but he's been back more frequent. An' he's here now, on bail, fer a job that would keep him busy for the next ten years, in anny other court. But Garritty is a clever man. If ye'll have naught to do with personal reasons, ask district-attorney Jameson why his case will be dismissed—oh, in six months, or so?"

Pegleg finished half incoherent with rage, yet Jimmy's acceptance of his complaints was almost casual.

"Maybe," he mused in reply. "How are you going to prove it, Hanlon, if it's true? It's one thing to ask where the money for that paving job went—Tivotson, here, tells me we've been asking just such questions for the last half dozen years—but it's another thing to be able to tell. You insist that there was a split-up between the electric crowd and the administration, but it's another thing to prove it,—isn't that true, Tivotson?"

For one instant Pegleg had forgotten to glower with rage. He was listening almost breathlessly. Twice the little city editor licked his lips and set his jaw, as Jimmy's hand fell intimately upon his elbow. And then he reached uneasily for the bottle.

"A fine chance," exclaimed Tivotson, and his gasp of relief was all out of proportion to the size of the drink which he presently consumed. "A fine chance of ever getting anything on that bunch."

Pegleg Hanlon sat and drummed on the table and stared at his plate. There was a hint of disappointment in Hanlon's attitude quite as obvious as the city editor's bland self-satisfaction. But Jimmy Gordon appeared far from displeased with the interview, which terminated there, more abruptly than it had begun.

On the way back to the office Tivotson elaborated volubly upon the iniquitous cleverness of the party in power which argued against their ever being haled to justice. He wagged his head over the matter, and

waxed out of breath, for he was hard put to it to keep pace with Jimmy's long stride.

It was not a great distance from Hanlon's to the *Courier* office, but it was the hour most favored for lunch by a large portion of Warchester's representative citizens, and more than once Jimmy had reason to suspect that already T. Elihu Banks had passed that way. Yet he found more amusement in the bearing of the little man beside him, than he did in the exceeding cordiality of the greetings which featured his passage that morning. And when he realized suddenly that Tivotson was the only one whom he could remember, who had evinced an open and aggressive pride in his companionship, he slipped one hand inside his city editor's elbow. Nor was this a part of the effort in which he and Pegleg had collaborated at lunch. Already he was certain of how much Tivotson knew. He was remembering how hungrily he had once watched the principals strut across the stage, and wondered at his own insignificance. To Tivotson he was a principal now. He felt sorry for the little man.

It was two hours after he reached the office of the *Courier* before Jimmy looked up from the task to which he set himself as soon as he had reached his desk. Tivotson had been watching him, curiously, while he worked, and the latter crossed with some haste to take the sheets of closely written copy which Jimmy held out to him.

"To-morrow's issue?" he asked, though the question was a mere matter of form.

Jimmy's brisk nod made him start.

"Six o'clock extra," the new owner of the *Courier* replied. "Run it front page, scare-heads. I want every man who passes a news-stand to see and read the head-lines."

Thereupon Tivotson set himself to read, but he was aghast before he had encompassed a single paragraph.

"You're going to—run this?" he stammered.

Jimmy Gordon had drawn a dog-eared manuscript from his pocket and was eying it strangely. His answer was anything but animated.

"Just as it stands, please," he said pleasantly.

Tivotson's very body seemed to shrink.

"Why, good Lord!" he breathed. "That—why, if you ever try to get into his house, after printing that—he—he'll throw you out."

"I hope he does," said Jimmy cheerfully. "If I ever try to, I hope he does."

The city editor had trouble with his speech.

"But he—he offered you," he managed, and then became inarticulate.

"An entrée into the very best circles, Tivotson, wasn't it—social and financial?" Jimmy had turned and was speaking quickly as though he dared not pause, lest he lose an opportunity for which he had been waiting. "Do you know, once I think I'd almost

have sold out. On my honor, I believe I would, had they given me the chance; but not now, Tivotson. That's where T. Elihu made his mistake—he waited too long. You see, Tivotson, I'm no longer sure that they are the best people. Don't look so horrified, man. We'll keep it a secret, and my opinion is only my own. I guess I must be a black sheep at heart."

But Jimmy smiled over the confession; he continued to smile after Tivotson had gone from the room to give orders for the first extra that the paper had run in years. And he was leading slowly through the blue-bound first act which once he had carried to Carl Hardy, the ghost of a grin lurking upon his lips, when the city editor returned. Now and then he stopped to stare up Front Street, now and then he paused to make a careful note. Abel Thompson looked in upon him several times, only to retreat, greatly impressed by his employer's preoccupation. And Jimmy had become accustomed to the opening and closing of the door, and gave it no notice when it creaked open, again, a little before four.

He had reached the first-act curtain, and was nodding absently to himself, the line of his lips faintly suggestive of mockery, when a low voice brought him to his feet.

"Very nice editors always rise, whenever I enter, Jimmy," it said.

Carol Landis had come on lighter feet than T. Elihu's. She stood only a pace away, a slender and

scarcely taller figure than that one which the boy had surprised, years back, before the mirror, in a mad little costume of black. She was in white now, from the panama upon her head, to the high-heeled pumps she wore.

Once, on that other occasion, Jimmy Gordon had sulked and spoken with masculine ungraciousness concerning her first engagement. And now, as he rose, he was only awkward and embarrassed. Which, after all, was the prettiest compliment that he could have paid her.

"I didn't hear you enter," he explained soberly.

Some of the laughter went out of the girl's eyes. T. Elihu Banks' scrutiny had been frankly and arrogantly an appraisal. She managed hers with more kindness and more tact, yet he was conscious of it, and of the conclusions at which she arrived. Decidedly hers was the greater ease.

"There's ink on your cuffs, Jimmy," she admonished him, "and a smudge on your cheek as usual. Go and wash yourself. I want you to take me out to the club to tea."

The order was reminiscent of other days when his obedience had been ungallant at times, but always more or less certain. From the very inconsequential ring which she contrived to give the command Jimmy knew that she was expecting him to demur. But the thought behind his momentary hesitation was not the one which she suspected.

"As your guest, Carol," he said, "if you're sure that you—" He broke off there to give way to explanation. "Mr. Banks dropped in this morning to welcome me home. He, too, suggested the club, whenever I cared to avail myself of his kindness. But I'm afraid that after five o'clock he will have changed his mind. I'm afraid that his offer will have been automatically withdrawn."

She did not understand as thoroughly as she might have, had she read the sheets which Tivotson had carried out, a short time before, to the press-room. But she sensed the depth of his gravity. And when he returned, with the ink-smudge removed from his cheek, he knew that she had been talking with the city editor, even though it was of the dog-eared first act, with its freshly penciled corrections, of which she spoke.

"It's the one that you took to Carl Hardy, years ago, isn't it?" she asked.

As he nodded she rolled the script up and tucked it under an arm.

"I want to read it—professionally," she explained. "I'm in dire straits for a vehicle, Jimmy."

CHAPTER XIV

THE "COURIER" PRINTS AN EXTRA

THAT afternoon Jimmy Gordon learned just how swiftly the news of T. Elihu's visit to the *Courier's* office had gone abroad. And he was vouchsafed some inkling of the fruits which it might be expected to bear.

The wide veranda of the Hills Club grew very quiet as he helped "Warchester's own daughter" to alight from the public conveyance which had toiled with them up the long grade, but in the silence there was only a vast curiosity. They stared—the half-score of men and girls who sat at wicker tables beneath the striped awnings—yet their regard was far from that with which they might have discouraged an interloper. Indeed, there was a certain eagerness upon more than one face, which Carol Landis would have noticed, had she not been thinking only of the man who mounted the steps beside her.

That afternoon she gave all the skill of which she was capable to the perfection of their entrance, without even realizing that the stage had already been prepared for just such a scene. Her hand lay upon the prodigal's sleeve as they threaded their way to a

table tucked back in the corner of the veranda; she talked blithely and laughed up into his face as he seated her. And it was not until the steward had come and gone that she looked up and learned from the look in his eyes that he knew how hard she had been trying to make it easy for him.

"I began to know how kind you were, yesterday," he thanked her. "This afternoon the lesson is complete. But I—I'd rather you didn't feel sorry for me, any longer." His eyes swept the nearer table, meaningly. "Apparently, and I needed no such corroboration, I'm a much to be envied man."

She grew warmly self-conscious at that—and then the arrival of Sidney Banks at their table cut short her rejoinder. Sidney had come as rapidly as he was able, direct from the courts. Feet wide-spread, he stood huge and hot and high-colored, and left no one in that vicinity ignorant of the degree or the phrasing of his welcome. More than that, he seated himself and remained until Carol Landis dismissed him, so firmly that he could not maintain longer his jovial refusal to go. And his was the example which the rest followed. Men drifted over from neighboring tables. They stopped on their way from golf-course to refreshment, for a hand-shake and a word or two. But the girl found the expression which settled upon the face of the man across from her at length impossible to be endured in silence.

"Not in bitterness, Jimmy, boy, I beg you," she

whispered. "Oh, you haven't forgotten how to laugh!"

Color stained his cheeks at that. Once or twice before then he had taken his watch from his pocket. He looked up from it now so abruptly that Carol turned to follow his gaze, which had gone beyond her. A car had drawn up in the driveway; a tall and black-haired girl, ineffably cool and possessed, was coming up the steps, bowing crisply to those who called out in greeting. And suddenly Carol found much of interest in the grounds within her cup.

"Miss Evelyn Latham, Jimmy," she murmured. "But of course you remember. And I shall not mind, very much, if you go over to speak to her—if you're not gone too long."

But Evelyn Latham was already approaching their table, with Lloyd Jameson, fatter even than he had been eight years before and somehow chastened in bearing, following as closely as his bulk would permit. In the tall girl's salute and that of her companion, both Carol and the man to whom they were addressed, found a quality different from those which had gone before.

"You are Jimmy Gordon, of course." She spoke with exceeding abruptness. "You used to watch me from your window." She laughed coolly as Jimmy flamed red. "I might have been more appreciative once, but"—and she stopped to shrug her shoulders. "We're giving a dance to-morrow night for the

usual crowd. Will you please come, Mr. Gordon."

She had turned away before he could reply, and was speaking, still with her odd abruptness to Carol. And then Jimmy found Lloyd Jameson facing him. Lloyd's face was shamed.

"If I were you, Gordon," he said heavily, "and you were me, I suppose I'd turn my back upon you. But—but maybe you're more generous. I played you very dirty once, but do you mind shaking hands with me and letting me tell you that I'm almost as sorry as I am ashamed?"

Jimmy did not know how to reply, and Evelyn Latham's brusqueness saved him the need.

"Miss Landis promises to bring you to-morrow night, Mr. Gordon," she said, "if it is possible. Come along, Lloyd. Did I hear you trying to apologize for something again?"

As directly as she had come, she returned to the car, and in going she left no doubt in the minds of all observers of what her errand had been. There was a maliciously mischievous glint in Carol's eyes after her departure.

"The fairy princess, Jimmy," she whispered, "so I'm afraid that my afternoon is spoiled. She remembered, you see! I'm asking you, tearfully, to take me home."

His smile was so apologetically like that of the boy she had known in other years that it hurt her. He was looking at his watch again as he rose.

"There'll be a lot of them who'll have forgotten that they ever knew me by this time to-morrow," he answered whimsically. "There's no coach waiting, Carol—not even a pumpkin—and I ordered that driver for five. I think if you don't mind walking, perhaps—

This time it was he who broke off to turn and follow the direction of her gaze. Sidney Estabrook Banks had appeared at that instant from within, his face frightfully congested. He took a step in Gordon's direction, and stopped. He would have spoken, and seemed to think better of that impulse and sneered instead. And when he wheeled and spoke rapidly to several who had risen in consternation, Carol looked bewilderedly up into Jimmy's face.

"Do you mind letting me stay?" he asked.

It was the tall, thin figure in shabby tweeds who contrived a graceful exit, but the face was very white.

"Not even a pumpkin coach," he murmured again, as they crossed the lawn and cut over the fields toward town. "I stayed too late." He wheeled then, fiercely vehement: "I'm sorry." He was breathing hard. "That was humiliating, for you." And then, with an edge to his laughter: "Tivotson's extra must be on the street."

Half the way home he was so moodily apologetic that she could not rage at him as she had in other years. But when he spoke at length concerning T. Elihu's visit that morning, she thought to see the opening for which she had hoped.

"Then why did you refuse?" she demanded hotly. "If—if all that—" she flung her head back toward the club-house from which they had come—"if all that means so much to you, why didn't you accept it at their terms?"

The mild astonishment which that outburst evoked surprised her.

"Means so much to me," he echoed. And then he seemed to grasp the meaning of her speech. "Perhaps it's because I'm still uncertain, Carol, whether they'd have me, at any rate."

That brought an angrier light to her eyes. But when he would have taken leave of her at the door of the cottage which was no longer drably in need of paint, she refused to let him go.

"I'm tired of dining alone, Jimmy," she said, "and you've not told me anything about yourself. Do you mind staying?"

He smiled wistfully.

"Do you mind letting me stay?" he asked.

And with that she slipped her hand into his and clung tight to his fingers.

"It's only yesterday," she said in a small voice. "You've grown taller, Jimmy, and your clothes still have that miraculous appearance of having been made for you alone, but you've not grown up. Will you wait out here for me. There are things to read, if you wish. I'll be back as quickly as I can." She paused in the doorway and flung him a persistently

cheerful backward glance. "You've not told me yet, Jimmy, that I've become something of a beauty," she laughed. "I doubt if there is anybody else in town who hasn't told me, several times at least."

She was gone before he could answer, and he sat immobile during her absence. Nor did he realize how long she really was, or find the waiting irksome. And when she came quietly down-stairs, the white costume changed for a frock of palest green, she stood for a long moment or two in the doorway, a tiny pulse growing and growing in her throat as she watched his face. Then he heard her step; he wheeled and saw her standing there. And before his awkward speechlessness she dropped her head.

"That is pretty, Jimmy, and—and very flattering," she murmured. "You could not have made it—more sincere."

She led the way inside to a small round table laid for two. She watched him sweep that changed front room with a glance.

"Like it?" she asked. "I did most of it myself."

"It's like you," he replied, and he spoke so diffidently, that she blinked back a suspicious moisture with some haste. But when she tried to turn the conversation into that channel, she found that he would not talk about himself. And then she found fresh cause for astonishment in his familiarity with what she laughingly referred to as her career.

Lips parted and face eagerly forward-thrust she

leaned toward him in the candlelight while he reviewed it, step by step.

"I missed the 'Satin Slipper,' " his statement was so painfully self-conscious that her bubbling laughter interrupted him—"the opening night here in Warchester, that is. But I saw it the next week in Providence. And the rest of them, one way or another, mostly from the balcony, I managed to witness on their first nights. Then you went West in stock; that was three years ago. Then you surprised them in Hardy's 'Three's a Crowd'; then 'Intoxication.' And now they say you'll be a star, I'm told Carl Hardy——"

Her eyes had become very, very bright during that recital.

"Your flowers came, that night we opened here in the Palace," she said, and then lips curled, she leaned even nearer until the points of light tinted dully the bronze of her bright head with gold. "I've never thanked you for them until now. But now I thank you, oh, greatly. But there's one thing you've forgotten Jimmy. Don't you remember that night you took me to rehearsal—the first night after you'd come home, to find I'd finally decided to go? Don't you remember my prophecy?"

He opened his lips, but she would wait for no answer.

"Well, here we are!" she rushed on, and she flung out both arms in an ecstatic little gesture that

embraced them both. "Don't you see, Jimmy, the table for two—and the candles—and no flowers to bother at all. And I—I need a play?"

And with that, suddenly and inexplicably, she was very near again to tears. He was trying very hard to play up to her lead.

"Only you promised to be very haughty at first," he reminded her slowly, "and instead——"

"I find it too difficult a rôle, Jimmy," she replied. "I've read that first act again. Did you think I was dressing all that time? And I daren't be too haughty for fear you'll carry it to a more appreciative leading lady." She waited, and toyed with the silver. "You—you haven't given up trying, have you?" she asked. "It isn't just Warchester and Warchester's approval that you want, is it?"

But now that he was looking at her she would not meet his eyes.

"You like it?" he asked quietly.

"Yes!"

"Honestly, you believe that it is worth finishing?"

"Yes—yes," she flung back at him. "I know it. I want to send it to Mr. Hardy again, if you'll have a copy made for me. Will you?"

"I'll have it copied to-morrow," he promised.

And he led her so surely into a discussion of a further development of that one act that she believed it was she who was leading him away from less pleasant thoughts. Several hours later she let him go

only after he had promised to start upon a second act before the week was old. She watched from behind a drawn shade and saw that he stood long after she had closed the door, his head bared. Before her mirror she found that her eyes were wet. She wrote Carl Hardy a glowing letter concerning a playwright of great promise whose work she meant to bring to notice before many days.

And Jimmy Gordon had made his way through barbed-wire fence and orchard and come out before the Latham hedge, before he had any clear recollection either of his whereabouts or his destination. He had been content merely to walk, and habit had led the way, but there he stopped suddenly, in the shadow, a chance audience of a bit of drama, realistic in the extreme, which was being enacted across the way.

The door of T. Elihu Banks' great brick house opened and shot a stream of pale light out into the night. T. Elihu's huge body stood framed in the doorway; the patch of radiance revealed before him a smaller, shambling figure in ill-fitting clothes. The latter seemed to find difficulty with his lines. T. Elihu supplied the action of the scene. Jimmy Gordon watched him swing Tivotson by the scruff of his neck to the top of the stairs and kick him toward the sidewalk. T. Elihu seemed to be talking. Then he turned and closed the door.

A moment later Jimmy assisted his city editor to

his feet. Together they turned their steps, without haste, for Tivotson had need to travel slowly, toward the *Courier* office downtown. And neither the proprietor of that sheet, nor its city editor, noticed that they left lying there upon T. Elihu's lawn where it had fallen from the latter's pocket, a red-headlined copy of the first extra that the *Courier* had run in years.

The walk back to the *Courier* office, toward which the owner of that ill-famed sheet and its ill-favored editor turned their steps, was accomplished in silence; but Jimmy sensed the outburst to come in Tivotson's stifled breathing.

The brisk walk, assisted by the night air, completed the process which the point of T. Elihu's right boot had begun. And Tivotson was sober enough to mount the stairs to the upper editorial room without assistance, in spite of the blackness of the passageway, when they finally reached that destination. In truth, he did stumble over the threshold; he blundered with a crash into a chair as he groped for his desk in the darkness. But that was due to no unsteadiness of foot. And Jimmy barely smothered a gasp, as he found the button and switched on the light.

The city editor's eyes were glazed and fixed; there was a cut across one eyebrow, not deep or dangerous, but none the less distinctly far from decorative. Mud he had acquired liberally and lost his hat; and

his collar, guiltless of tie, being loose from the band of his shirt, hung in a waggish flapping curl above one ear.

Yet it was the disorder of the man's face and not that of his habiliments, which amazed his employer, who, in a degree, had been prepared for some such spectacle. Tivotson was indeed sober when he should have been very, very drunk, considering all that he had consumed since the five o'clock extra appeared on the streets, but his face was twisted and alarmingly white with the shock which had sobered him.

A very certain change had taken place in Tivotson. It was self-evident in the little man's shambling, slack body, which was slack and shambling no longer.

For many years his illusions concerning himself had been anything but rapt. It was in another quarter that his sentiments had suffered a violent readjustment. And then, with startling suddenness, out of complete quiet, he began to laugh.

At the first hysterical cackling Jimmy Gordon whirled in his own chair near the window. He had heard men break down with just such laughter, just before they began to scream with terror, and he was half-prepared to find his city editor climbing upon the desk, or shudderingly covering his eyes from visions which most heartily he did not want to see. But when he turned, Tivotson was still in his place, his face gaunt and ghostly and strained in the half-light.

And he continued to laugh shrilly, with no mirth in

the high-pitched cachinnations, until, from very heartlessness, he could laugh no longer.

"No proof!" he chuckled then huskily, and Jimmy's own body tautened as he realized that Tivotson was harking back to their luncheon conversation at Hanlon's. "No proof!" And with that he needs must laugh again until he choked. Then, for the first time, he looked his employer squarely in the eye.

"I'm sober," he assured that silent figure. "Cold sober."

Jimmy nodded.

Tivotson's next words seemed in the nature of a mental digression.

"Banks kicked me off his front steps a while ago," he said vaguely, but the vagueness was in no way reassuring so far as Tivotson's sentiments toward the gentleman mentioned were concerned.

"I happened to be watching," said Jimmy simply. "I helped you up."

It was Tivotson's turn to nod.

"That's so," he mused. "I'd forgotten."

A pause ensued.

"Any idea why I was calling upon our esteemed fellow townsman?" he inquired, with an odd mixture of woebegone defiance and level-eyed bitterness.

"None whatsoever," Jimmy lied gravely.

"I went up to tip him off that you were going to get him if you could. I went up to tell him that you said you hoped he'd kick you out if you ever tried to

enter his house." He pointed to a copy of the afternoon extra. "As if that wasn't enough! But I'd forgotten—that's how drunk I was. And—" Tivotson's voice grew almost ruminative—"and he kicked me out instead. That's funny, isn't it? But you don't know yet how funny it is. I've been selling this sheet out to T. Elihu Banks for the last ten years—selling anything that was worth a dollar to T. Elihu, hours before it was printed. And I was going to sell you—that's the kind of a dog I am—the same day you shook hands with me and treated me like something human. But he kicked me off his steps, just because he had to have something to kick, and I was handy. And why not? Wouldn't a dog like me come around again the next morning—thirsty—and whining for more?"

Jimmy's eyes had never left Tivotson's. When he perceived that the latter was awaiting a reply, he grinned a little crookedly.

"I don't know—would he?" he murmured.

Tivotson ignored his question. He had picked up the copy of the extra and was reading from it with savagely satirical mockery.

"HOW DID YOU GET AWAY WITH IT, T. ELIHU?" he drawled the huge headline, and then he attacked with the same dangerously shaken voice the body of the short but sensational text.

"To-day the *Courier* had the unexpected honor of playing host to T. Elihu Banks, talked of as a

Senatorial possibility. The esteemed gentleman called upon us in person, and while the *Courier*, as it assured him, is not yet in the political market, there is one question vital to us which we would like to ask. Nothing so far removed as a Senatorial nomination interests us—that is to-day. We are, as is perhaps well known, only about two jumps ahead of bankruptcy. Yet we are hopeful. After having given the Traction franchise deal, the Main Street paving deal, etc., a cursory examination, we take courage. There seems to be easy money to be made at home, if one only knows the ropes. How should we proceed to get away with it, T. Elihu?"

When Tivotson finished, Jimmy was smiling.

"I rather like that paragraph. But you should have known better than to go near him to-night," he admonished his city editor with whimsical gravity. "I don't think we pleased T. Elihu, do you?"

"Why don't you throw me out of the window?" Tivotson mumbled numbly in reply.

And suddenly the ache in the little man's eyes was so dull and dispirited a thing that Jimmy could not sit and watch it. He rose and crossed and dropped both hands on the drooping shoulders.

"We black-sheep must stick together, Tivotson," he repeated his words of the day before. "It's positively our only chance in Warchester."

With that Tivotson's breakdown was absolute. Jimmy went back to his window and waited. And at

last, when quiet had come again, he felt Tivotson looking at him. He spoke without lifting his chin from his hand.

"You spoke of proof, Tivotson," he said. "Do you feel sure you could——"

He got no further with his tentative question. Tivotson interrupted him.

"Proof! Sure! Didn't I get my bit? Wasn't I in on every deal? Don't I know what Latham split, and Banks—and District Attorney Jameson—yes, and Wainwright, too? Washington, eh! Washington! Why, I'm going to send those crooks to jail!"

Tivotson stormed up to his climax with a wrath so righteous that Jimmy could no longer control himself. He gave way to immoderate laughter that left him with tears in his eyes. Tivotson sat watching him with an appreciative grin.

"I told you it was funny," he said.

"It is," Jimmy answered, when he gained self-control, "only—only there's one flaw in your beautifully benevolent plan. You'd be likely to go, too, you see."

The grin was wiped from Tivotson's face, and an almost injured look replaced it.

"But *that's* the joke—that's the funny part of it," he answered. "Won't I have a select coterie of Warchester's best people to keep me company?"

Jimmy gave it up and again succumbed to mirth.

"Now I know you're sober, Tivotson," he said.

"Your sense of humor is delicious, if you'll pardon the word. To show my appreciation I'd ask you to step out and have a drink with me only I suppose you aren't drinking any more, are you?"

"I—I don't know," he stammered ludicrously. "Am I?"

"I took it for granted that you weren't, for a time, at least. If I'm wrong——"

Tivotson waved a lean hand, hungry-eyed but game.

"Just as you say," he agreed. "It's immaterial anyhow. If I get what I hope's coming to them, it'll be a long, long drought for me."

"True enough," replied Jimmy, but he seemed to be thinking of something else. "And yet I'm afraid you'll have to forego that hope. I need you here, Tivotson. I can't spare you, just now. I need your saving sense of humor."

The pallid little man stiffened.

"He kicked me off his front-steps," he reminded the other, stubbornly, "I've got to get him."

"We'll get him," said Jimmy—and his next words puzzled his city editor—"and who could ask for a better second act curtain than that?"

Tivotson blinked.

"Huh?" he asked.

Jimmy's smile was diffident, almost apologetic.

"I'm glad I came back," he went on. "Tivotson, sometimes I think I'd rather be an underdog than sit

in the high places of the mighty. One's view is less clouded—that's paradoxical enough, isn't it?" And then one learns to bear up under disappointment better—being disappointed often enough, God knows."

"I wish you'd write up your little experience of this evening. (Of course the climax is painful, but I'd dwell on it rather strongly, nevertheless.) Just tell our readers that the *Courier* returned Mr. Banks' call last night—returned it promptly and punctiliously—with a view to getting a personal answer to the question which we asked that gentleman in yesterday's extra. Make no secret of the fact that he kicked us off his front-steps, or of our injured feelings. I think I'd hint, rather plainly, that just for that we aren't going to let him be our Senator to Washington, and that we propose to answer the question ourselves, if they'll be patient awhile.

"Head it 'The *Courier* Returns T. Elihu's Call!' Get it in to-morrow's issue—but it's to-day's issue now— isn't it? I'll wait and go over it with you, when you've finished. I—I've some work of my own to do."

Tivotson turned with a yelp of enthusiasm to act upon the suggestion, but the tall thin figure in the shabby tweeds sat motionless at the window, a cigarette between his lips, his eyes tired, his pencil idle. While he watched, a yellow Airedale trotted into view on the silent street below. He seemed

self-possessed and unhurried, yet glad to be home again. Jimmy recognized Hanlon's Oh Boy, back from his latest excursion. He watched him out of sight and then went suddenly to work.

He was half-hidden beneath the blue of a cloud of cigarette smoke when the city editor stopped at his elbow on his way to the pressroom.

"Extremely good, Tivotson," he murmured, but obviously his mind was not in the words. "Simple and plausible—and human—very human. Run it as it stands."

An hour later, just before daybreak, Tivotson went home to change his clothes. Quite inexplicably, and without analyzing his new-found self-respect, the little man did not want to be seen on the streets in raiment such as that which draped him. And when he returned at nine in suit and shoes that fairly shrieked their newness to all beholders, Jimmy was still at his desk, a dead cigarette between his lips, sorting into place, with fine preoccupation, a thick sheaf of closely written pages.

"Not too bad—as second acts go," Tivotson heard him murmur. "Some comedy—considerable heart-interest—and a note of suspense, and very, very human, as Hardy would say. Thank God for Tivotson; it needed just that touch. And now I'll get a wire off to Hardy before——"

The rest of it Tivotson ignored. Thank God for

Tivotson he heard, and while he did not exactly understand, the words brought a stain of color into his hollow cheeks. It was miracle enough to have found out that someone viewed his existence with something besides tolerance, without hearing that person mutter thanks in accents fervidly absent-minded. From that hour Tivotson's attitude was truly doglike. It was four o'clock in the afternoon before he remembered even to be thirsty.

CHAPTER XV

AN UNPROVOKED AND SHAMEFUL ASSAULT

NEWSBOYS were hawking the morning edition of the sheet containing Tivotson's account of his visit to the town's great man, neglecting to an astonishing degree the *Gazette*, T. Elihu Banks' own organ, which featured Wainwright's answer to the preposterous issue of the day before. And Jimmy stopped at the corner of Main and Front Streets to purchase a copy of both publications from a vender, who ceased hitching at his nether garments, supported by one precarious suspender, and stood struck dumb as he recognized his customer.

The owner of the *Courier* understood the boy's emotions. He had seen men stand and stare with just such bated and incredulous interest at a Jesse James type of criminal, who had been apprehended in the perpetration of a crime so heinous that one quite forgot its atrocity in marveling at the mad temerity which had led the man to commit it. Yet there was one essential quality lacking in the boy's gaze which convinced Jimmy that he was perhaps not regarded quite in this light, after all. There was neither envy nor grizzly admiration in the newsboy's fascinated scrutiny, but rather a worldwise air of

scorn. Thus, indeed, with two feet added to his stature and two score years to his age, he might have looked upon one Thomas Mott a half-witted and wholly miserable lump of clay, lately featured in the metropolitan prints as the slayer of a widow and some six or eight small children. Distinctly the gaze was not one of flattery; and Jimmy failed to do the moment justice. Had he frowned fiercely the incident might have remained somehow impressive; instead he allowed his amusement to gleam in his eyes. Thereupon he ceased instantly to be even an awesome figure.

"Ya-a-y," the shrill-voiced gamin shouted to a companion, the instant his tall customer's back was fairly turned. "Ya-a-y, Guffy! That's him now! That's him! The—big—stiff!"

For a moment the light in Jimmy's eyes was a little disconcerted at the personally inimical note of contempt which the ribald identification carried. Then it occurred to him that he had not been on the streets since the appearance of the extra the previous afternoon, except at an hour when they were practically deserted, and the amusement not only returned to his eyes but communicated itself to his lips as well.

If the newsboy's attitude was to be accepted as fairly indicative of popular opinion. . . .

Main street was not deserted now. At no other hour was one so likely to meet upon the streets those

citizens in whose hands lay the city's larger affairs, save perhaps at noon. Only a day earlier Jimmy Gordon had been compelled to pause and shake hands at least a score of times, in half as many minutes, in covering those same two blocks which stretched between the corner and the alley that led to Hanlon's. But no one insisted now that he stop, either for a bantering word or two, or a hearty handclasp. Thereupon, with the newsboy's comment vividly in mind, Jimmy tried bowing to the first two or three men he met—men who had hastened to meet him the day before—not because he expected the bow to be returned, but largely as an experiment in human nature. He bowed and smiled, and the phenomenon was instant and illuminating. The first target for his cordiality turned his back upon him with considerable violence; the next two crossed the street to avoid passing him by.

In other years Jimmy's appearance upon that thoroughfare, especially when Hanlon's was his destination, had always meant a display of disapproval, but it had never been so vast and bitterly unanimous a thing before. In truth the town's lost dog had come home, and, true to the instinct of the breed, had bitten the first hand stretched out to feed him.

Main Street left nothing said or undone, save perhaps actual physical chastisement, which might express its opinion of such wanton viciousness.

Immediately Jimmy gave over bowing, condemning the experiment as ill conceived, and of doubtful value, and kept his eyes to the front. Proceeding in such fashion, unable to remain oblivious to the comments and glances that kept him pace, he nevertheless created the impression of a preoccupied and cosmopolitan idler who, sauntering to keep a pleasant but not necessarily pressing engagement, permitted himself to exhibit a trace of quizzical amusement at much that he encountered on the way. Nor did this bearing prove in any way soothing to those who watched him pass. But the smile that lurked on his lips had become fine-edged and strained in spite of himself, when he finally neared the old Palace Theater Building.

Here he was forced to swing to one side of the pavement to avoid a knot of men which did not break up at his approach. Jimmy heard fragments of their discourse; he caught a glimpse of the chief spokesman, who held the center of the throng, and was wondering casually if the latter had stationed himself there with the expectation that he would pass that way, when suddenly the ring split open. Judge Jameson (the title had clung to him since the days when he had served a less complex community as justice of the peace) plunged through the ranks of his audience. Rage marred the benevolence with which the gentleman's white beard endowed his face; passion spoiled his usually benign austerity. And

there was a white circle about his lips, and half circles, correspondingly dark, beneath his eyes. Decidedly the eminent legal authority's appearance suggested a sleepless night, as did the ragged savagery of his greeting.

"A damnable outrage, sir," he roared as he spread his legs and blocked the passage of Warchester's newest journalist. "A damnably treacherous piece of business, sir, which, I promise you, shall be punished to the full extent of the law."

And, as he talked, he waved a copy of the *Courier's* extra in one hand and smote it with the other, thus leaving the editor of that sheet in no doubt whatever concerning the subject of his remarks.

The tall, thin figure came to a stop; the smile was in evidence, though slightly crooked now.

"Good morning, Judge." He at least remembered the niceties of formal usage, though he made no advance which might have indicated a willingness to shake hands. "Good morning, sir—and thank you! I can't tell you how greatly it encourages me to hear you utter such sentiments, particularly in this positive and public fashion." He paused, and the smile became charmingly disingenuous. "I—I was beginning to believe that I had stirred up no end of hostility. There were so many who had to take pains not to see me on the streets this morning. But that's usually the way, I suppose. No doubt they are waiting for a gentleman of your prestige to counte-

nance a change which must come, of course, inevitably. It is an outrage, as you say. It is damnably small—damnably treacherous. And perhaps I should add, sir, that those words express my estimate of all public servants who use their power to further personal ends, just as dishonest, though, perhaps, less gainful. May I quote you, sir, as having allied yourself——”

The circle had tightened again, this time with the tall, thin figure who smiled, and the shorter one who glared at him from popping eyes, as its nucleus. And for a moment it was a dumbfounded, exceedingly bewildered circle.

For T. Elihu's black sheep of a nephew, instead of cringing, had brightened visibly before the forensic bellowings of District Attorney Jameson. There was pleased gratification in his lean and familiarly apologetic face, such as one who has performed a thankless task only to find himself the object of unsought encomium might be expected to exhibit. And only one or two caught the ghastly significance of his complacency. He believed—he dared to believe—that Judge Jameson, T. Elihu's own lawyer, had meant to——

Then Jameson recovered his breath, and cleared even the most sluggish mind of perplexity.

“You quote me,” he thundered. “You dare to quote me in that dirty rag as having voiced any such utterance, and I—I'll——”

He paused, groping for a threat which might do the case justice, and in that infinitesimal moment of quiet Jimmy Gordon underwent a swift change of face. His gratification was seen to vanish.

"Yes, Judge," he asked softly. "You'll do—what?"

Men pressed closer; men came on a run and packed the throng still tighter. It was as if an electric thrill had gone abroad of a sudden to warn them that here was the prime sensation of the morning.

"I'll run you out of town," the Judge bellowed. "I'll run you out of town, just as I did eight years ago, you good-for-nothing—slanderous——"

Jimmy cut him so short that he almost choked. Nor could there be any doubt now concerning the expression on the former's face. It was rage—that sort of white rage with which no sensible man cares particularly to trifle. Yet his voice was pleasant and conversationally quiet.

"No, you won't Judge," he contradicted. "No more than I will you, unless you wait too long before seeing the error of your ways—though I've promised myself, often enough, that I'd do it for you, God knows."

And with that crowning bit of verbal effrontery, the owner of the *Courier* raised one arm. Later the true interpretation of that gesture was the bone of much bitter contention. Hobbs, for instance of the Hardware, who prided himself on being above all a

fair-minded man, maintained that Jimmy had merely waved aside those who blocked his path that he might pass on to Hanlon's. But Wilbert, Drugs and Toilet Sundries, always to be swayed by his personal likes and dislikes, insisted with heated indignation that the move could be construed as nothing but the vilest and most cowardly of threats against an elderly gentleman, obviously unable to protect himself from physical assault. Wilbert belonged to an old-fashioned era of Warchester, when cow-hiding had been held to be a specific for certain cases, fully as infallible and no more reprehensible than mustard-plasters and sulphur and molasses. He was even heard to urge some such drastic punishment after Jimmy Gordon was gone from sight and hearing.

But whatever the true meaning of that uplifted arm (and there were few who did not lean toward Wilbert's interpretation of its dastardly intent), the result was speedy and astounding.

For Judge Jameson, falling back before the white-faced editor, tripped upon his own panic feet and came down full length in the gutter. Those who heard his splutterings as they assisted him to rise, found them fully as unintelligible as Jimmy Gordon's last words had been enigmatic of meaning. They refused to credit their own ears in wondering if Jimmy Gordon had really threatened to run the eminent gentleman out of town—all but the eminent gentleman himself, who had no need to wonder. He

shook off a dozen solicitous hands and started for T. Elihu's office. He knew.

And within an hour it was common gossip that Judge Jameson, who had once incurred Jimmy Gordon's undying enmity through the performance of his sworn duty, had suffered harshly at that returned renegade's hands. There were many versions of the affair, which tallied only in one particular. The attack had been unprovoked and shameful. Before noon Wilbert, an eyewitness, was not only able to recollect, but to illustrate as well, with approved pugilistic poses, the very blow which had felled the defenseless victim.

And the offender (allowed to depart the scene unpunished and unscathed, owing to the fact that he had taken the bystanders by surprise) entered Hanlon's and confronted the proprietor of that hostelry at the same moment when they were assisting Judge Jameson to his feet outside.

Immediately a frown furrowed Hanlon's forehead. He had accepted Jimmy Gordon's return to Warchester as a happy actuality, viewing him as a Joseph who might explain the minority party's nightmare of seven lean years and interpret their dream of seven years of plenty into terms of action. Without being analytical about it, so far as he was concerned, it was still the same quizzical-faced boy of few words who had come back, changed neither inwardly nor outwardly, save that he had grown inches taller. But

the Jimmy of old had always masked his emotions, having no faith that they might prove interesting to anyone but himself. This was the first time that Hanlon had ever known the town's black sheep to permit anything so positive as either joy or rage to show in his features.

"Steady!" he exclaimed, as Jimmy burst in. "Steady! Faith, an' what's changed yer face? Aire ye runnin' away from a fight?"

Jimmy whirled. His eyes were hot.

"I've been hurrying to keep from starting one!" he flashed back.

The manner of the reply was illuminating, and from that moment Hanlon's suspicions were awake. He began to wonder if Jimmy Gordon was really a prodigal of the approved, penniless pattern, who, reversing the usual romantic order of things, had come home to make his fortune. It was a grave suspicion, and so, to cover his doubt, he fell back upon a topic which all the rest of Warchester had found futile.

"Lad," he said, as he drew a copy of the *Courier* from his pocket, in a drawl with mock reproof, "Lad, what a hell of a question to ask a gentleman! How—did—ye—git—away—with—it—T. Elihu? Ain't ye ashamed of yerself?"

Calculated or not, the effect of the raillery was magical. All in an instant, it was the old Jimmy Gordon who stood there, grinning whimsically, half-

apologetically, without the slightest trace of fire in his eye.

"It's the fruit of my coarse associations," he retorted in kind, "I've forgotten all the nice little tricks of social etiquette!"

"Ye've forgot to shave." Hanlon's voice grew mincing. "And, by-the-by, yer val-lay has laid out yer things, me good man!"

Thereupon, no longer able to restrain his vast approval, the proprietor of Hanlon's crushed Jimmy's shoulders in a bear-like embrace.

"Ye divil!" he roared delightedly. "Ye lazy-eyed, grinnin' divil. Make yerself dacint and come down and breakfast wid me. 'Tis starvin' I am to hear the disgraceful details."

CHAPTER XVI

A SERIES OF CONFERENCES

ANY number of discussions took place that day, wherever one man encountered another who would listen; all directly traceable to the infamy of Jimmy Gordon and the boldness of his utterances in the sheet which bore his name. But there were three in particular, capable of classification as a series of conferences, since each depended upon the one which had gone before while tending toward a common climax, that were of singular importance.

The first took place between Judge Jameson and T. Elihu Banks; the second between the latter prominent citizen and the up-start editor who had flung mud at him; and the third, two days later, shared again by Judge Jameson and another personage who waited until after dark to keep the appointment—a personage who was, in his own quite different world of society, equally as prominent as any of them.

Judge Jameson lost but little time in seeking out T. Elihu Banks that morning of his disastrous encounter with Jimmy Gordon. The hour still

lacked a few minutes of ten when T. Elihu, pacing up and down his private office, himself in a dangerous state of mind, stopped to glare at the entrance of his legal representative and fellow candidate on the Civic Welfare ticket. Jameson's face very amply indicated his turmoil of spirit; the state of his toilet was a superfluity. T. Elihu's bearing was more like that of a caged lion, both in the way he swung his head from side to side as he walked, and the padded softness of his heavy tread. Even the roar which he emitted, simultaneous with the closing of the office door, was leonine, at least in volume. The first conference opened noisily.

In the beginning, the town's most prominent citizen confined himself to a dissertation upon the *Courier* and its owner, past and present, antecedents and ancestors. And the future to which he consigned them both, when he had arrived at that point, suffered neither from lack of luridness nor poverty of phrase.

The Reverend Watson Duncan, who had already been in conference with Mr. Banks, if the part he played as overawed auditor for T. Elihu's explosive grunts could be so designated, tried to keep the pained shock from showing too plainly in his face. Indeed, from the moment the Reverend Watson Duncan had entered the room, summoned there peremptorily by his stepson's uncle, Mr. Duncan's state of mind had been unenviable. And as he

listened, seated against the wall, he suggested, more than ever before, an harassed old buck-rabbit, quakingly conscious of his rabbitiness and tendencies, yet hopeful that the nervous twitchings of his nose might not betray him.

Jameson waited until he could make himself heard.

"I—I suppose you have seen this morning's issue of the *Courier*," he ventured then, in a voice grown so thin and bodiless that even he heard the note of fear in it. Upon T. Elihu it had the effect of a sharp-tined prodding iron.

"Sit down," he ordered profanely, "if your knees are growing weak." But then, recovering himself enough to read a new development in Jameson's face, which was a bulletin of disaster, he fell back upon a question. "What's happened now?"

Jameson was mopping his forehead.

"I've just had an altercation with that crook, Gordon," he replied, "a—a very disconcerting altercation." He seemed to set himself like a high diver for the next plunge. "I suspect somebody has—squealed," he finished.

This possibility was suggested in a very small voice and accompanied by a sidewise glance toward the reverend gentleman, which might have been construed either as a belated thought for caution or a delicate apology for speaking in such terms of one of Mr. Duncan's own family circle. Mr. Banks suffered from no such compunction.

Again he frothed, and again achieved partial calmness.

"Suspect someone has squealed—suspect!" He mimicked Mr. Jameson's intonation with cruel precision. "Damnation, man, can't you ever approach an issue without quibbling? It's Tivotson—the drunken fool—or didn't you realize that, even after they'd told you so in this morning's paper!"

If T. Elihu had expected a display of positive and belligerent support on the part of his colleague, the latter's face at that moment, a decidedly unpleasant yellow above the white benevolence of his whiskers, corrected the error in his judgment. The man seemed fairly to shrink within his clothes.

"You mean he'll tell——" he whispered.

T. Elihu ripped out an interruption. There was stuff in T. Elihu Banks.

"God!" He shattered any belief which Mr. Duncan might have held that there had been a pious invocation in former like explosions. "Good God! And I've got to depend on you!"

Jameson offered no defense of his collapse. He lifted a haggard face.

"Anything I can do," he began, when T. Elihu wheeled toward the little and rabbity figure against the wall. St. Luke's congregation would have been equally astounded at the tone of the words which T. Elihu flung at their dapper shepherd, and the latter's meek alacrity to obey.

"I'm busy," he ordered briefly. "Close the door behind you."

Mr. Duncan almost leaped to obey. He had been quaking with the fear that T. Elihu might reproach him with a kinship which he had already repudiated some eight years before, or find him somehow blameworthy for the present dilemma. But with the feel of the knob under his fingers, a very certain retreat open to him, he gave thought to his ecclesiastical dignity and managed to conquer, partly, the quaver in his throat.

"I shall not intrude upon your time now, sir," he said. "Some other time—some other time!" But the usually airy gesture with which he was wont to wave aside the urgency of his visits, was wofully stiff. "And I need not assure you, gentlemen, that I shall do all I can to combat from my pulpit the forces of iniquity and deceit."

His well-rounded pronunciamiento fell upon stony ears. T. Elihu was pacing the office rug once more. This time when he paused, decision was evident in the set of his jaw.

"Garritty in town?" he asked.

Jameson nodded.

"I—have every reason to believe——" he began, and then realized the unfortunate habit of circumlocution had almost betrayed him again. "He's here," he corrected himself.

"Get in touch with him," he ordered. "And wait

until you hear from me. I'm going to find out first if this dog means to see this thing through, or is only waiting until he gets his price."

"He threatened to drive me out of town," Jameson burst out, just—just as I did him, eight years ago. What shall I tell Garrity?"

Mr. Banks laughed aloud in sudden bitterness.

"If I had only hooked up with him then," he said, "I'd have a man behind me now. Tell Garrity? Unless you hear from me before night, just remind him that any change in the administration would be a most unfortunate thing for him."

Jameson's comprehension was complete, yet it failed to bring him any degree of comfort or restored confidence. Fish-like he opened and closed his mouth, without achieving any sound whatever. (Instead a new apprehension showed in his eyes.) T. Elihu stood above him an instant, surveying him with unconcealed disgust.

"Don't go back on the street until you look less like a five-year sentence," he flung over his shoulder as he turned away. "And you can get that in this State for . . . but no doubt you recollect the statutes."

T. Elihu slammed the door behind him.

The second interview, which occurred at three in the afternoon, was purely the outcome of chance, since Jimmy had decided that he would not return to the office that day.

Directly after lunch, having submitted meekly to the ministrations of Abel, he started eagerly toward the white cottage, which had once been known as old Dave Landis' place on the hill. The rough draft of his second act discreetly displayed in one pocket of his coat, he waited in a manner which he felt befitted a hopeful, yet somewhat awed playwright in the presence of Miss Carol Landis, only to have the door opened for him by the maid. Somehow, he had expected that Carol herself would answer the bell, and even the little maid noticed the tall, thin gentleman's moment of awkward blankness, when she announced that Miss Landis was out. And, suddenly, Jimmy found the afternoon, which had impressed him as particularly bright and cheerful, no longer especially exhilarating. It was the first time he had ever gone to seek Carol Landis to find her not at home, and he was glad that he had chosen the longer route, and avoided the Banks-Latham neighborhood on the way up the hill. Retracing his steps, he tried to laugh at his absurd expectation that there still would be no one to monopolize her time but himself—Jimmy Gordon, again the town's reproach. And as for the rest, he could put in the afternoon typing that second act and writing a letter to Hardy.

He had finished the letter when T. Elihu Banks entered the *Courier's* editorial rooms, a scant five minutes after his return. It required a second warn-

ing cough from Tivotson to apprise his superior of the visitor's presence, however, for Jimmy had fallen upon his typewriter with a zeal calculated to occupy his mind to the exclusion of a disquieting contemplation of his own ridiculous presumption in having dared to think that she even recollected his old-time, arrogant, matter-of-fact intimacy.

The smile with which he greeted T. Elihu could have meant almost anything, or nothing, just as one cared to view it. It was a very pleasant smile.

"I'm sorry," he apologized for having kept the big man standing. "I didn't hear you enter. You'll sit down, of course."

T. Elihu did so without replying. His small eyes traveled to Tivotson's eagerly forward-thrust face, and dwelt upon it without a flicker of recognition, even for the little man's changed appearance.

"If you can grant me just a moment or two, in private, sir," he suggested to Jimmy. "I'll be brief. . . ."

The owner of the *Courier* frowned ever so slightly.

"Tivotson shares alike all the hazards and benefits which are peculiar to this enterprise of ours." He seemed to demur. "There is a bond of sympathy between us. However," he quickened his speech a little as T. Elihu showed signs of impatience with this introspective irrelevance, "however, since you wish it. . . ."

Tivotson effaced himself with leisurely grimness. And the moment he was gone, Mr. Banks, having translated very literally Jimmy's assurance that half of all profits were to be the city editor's share, proceeded directly to the matter in hand. There was even a hint of relief in T. Elihu's manner, for the simplicity of his precious nephew's insinuation cleared the issue. It had become, so to speak, strictly a business deal. He opened negotiations on that basis.

"How much do you want—your rock-bottom figure?" he asked.

A twinkle appeared in Jimmy's eye, but he clung to that almost naïve frankness, of which T. Elihu so approved.

"It was on the tip of my tongue to ask—how much have you?" he laughed genially. "I don't mean to haggle, either, Mr. Banks, or beat about the bush, but just what, or how much do I understand you wish to purchase?"

T. Elihu's great jaw seemed to edge forward.

"That treacherous sot's silence——" he began, when Jimmy interrupted.

"I couldn't guarantee that under any circumstances. Tivotson has taken a—a very decided aversion to you, sir, if you get my meaning. I couldn't promise to keep Tivotson silent."

"Then, your agreement not to back him up in his charges. I can take care of him."

"I see," murmured Jimmy—"and what else?"

"The *Courier*," said T. Elihu succinctly. "A public retraction of your unfounded attack, which we will not discuss at this moment, and—a decision on your part to leave Warchester—oh say in a week or two."

The twinkle became brighter in Jimmy's eyes.

"What!" he exclaimed, "again! And then seriously, as the case demanded. "Is that all, Mr. Banks?"

T. Elihu nodded; his eyes glistening and piglike.

"And the consideration?" ventured Jimmy.

"Twenty thousand!"

For a moment Jimmy pondered and then sighed deeply.

"I value the *Courier*, greatly," he mused. "As a newspaper property it is improving, as you'll agree. And then—there are sentimental reasons which make me reluctant to——"

"Twenty-five thousand," said T. Elihu.

"And then," Jimmy went on. "I—I'm not so sure that I want to leave Warchester just at present. It would necessitate a very serious change in my——"

T. Elihu's heavy lips curled a little. He had expected to find it a hard bargain. He drew out his wallet.

"Thirty thousand," he snapped. "And that's my limit. I could fight you cheaper than that, and beat you, but——"

"But the Civic Reform folks mean to nominate you by acclaim for Senator two weeks from Saturday," Jimmy finished for him serenely. "Put your money back in your pocket, Mr. Banks."

And in a breath both men, at that, were on their feet.

The twinkle was gone from Jimmy's eyes and T. Elihu had begun to breathe heavily.

"You promised to make it brief," Jimmy Gordon said softly. "Have you finished?"

T. Elihu's great moon-face went purple. He wheezed inarticulately, sucked in a great gulping breath and raised one soft hand to hammer emphasis for his promise of destruction.

"Then let me show you the way out," murmured Jimmy hastily, smiling still, though his face was strained and white. "Tivotson, if you please."

At that peremptory call the door flashed open, disclosing Tivotson on the stairs. And as T. Elihu, loosing his preliminary bellow, whirled in that direction, Jimmy caught the bulky visitor by his trousers belt and the slack of his collar and started him for the exit. Before he could resist against the rigid arms which propelled him, T. Elihu was on the stairway—and there was no wisdom in offering resistance there. So Jimmy Gordon escorted the town's great man to the lower level, with the city editor showing the way.

"The outer door, if you please," Jimmy called

sharply as he neared the landing. "Where are your manners, Tivotson?"

"Sorry, sir," replied Tivotson. "It's open now, sir." And he made a low bow to T. Elihu.

With that, having a premonition of what was to come, Mr. Banks heaved his bull-like shoulders in one convulsive struggle. One was all he essayed, for the wire-like fingers in his collar promptly promised to strangle him if he repeated the attempt.

So they debouched upon the outer steps, a wheezing purple-faced man, and a white-faced one who smiled. And Jimmy Gordon had lifted his foot to speed their parting guest, when an unforeseen interruption spoiled this clear and happy intent.

Someone called Jimmy Gordon's name from the street, and Jimmy recognized that someone's voice. He looked up. Carol Landis was riding past, beside Evelyn Latham at the wheel of her car, and both girls waved a hand in greeting. In consternation Jimmy released his visitor's coat collar, suddenly so flushed and ludicrous a figure that he resembled nothing so much as an abashed small boy, who had been caught in a mischievously reprehensible act.

And then with one eye on the disappearing car, which momentarily had become a menace to traffic, since both driver and passenger were gazing back the way they had come, he, too, bowed to T. Elihu. From a distance he hoped it would appear to be a polite and punctilious salutation.

"So good of you to call, Mr. Banks," he murmured, but already there was contrition in his stifled voice. "Come, Tivotson."

Followed by the little man he mounted the stairs. For a brief instant he stood before a square glass on the wall of the office, surveying his guilty countenance. Then Jimmy slumped into a chair, and with Tivotson leaning against the desk, he soberly thought over the happenings of the last few hours. Then the storm surged up within him, and he laughed until he groaned like a stricken man.

The same night of T. Elihu's visit at the office of the *Courier*, shortly after twelve, one Whitey Garritty, out on bail on a charge of grand larceny, which, twice postponed, was scheduled for trial early in the winter, paused before the house of the District Attorney, whose duty it would be to prosecute him. Whistling ever so softly between his teeth, Whitey stopped there a while, making certain that he was alone and unobserved on that part of the street. The reconnaissance satisfactory, he slipped from the sidewalk to a clump of bushes on the lawn and waited again, and from there to the entry of Mr. Jameson's residence. Trying the knob with sophisticated fingers, Whitey felt the door yield, and without the formality of so much as a knock to announce himself, he swung it open. Announcement, however, was unnecessary. Mr. Jameson rose from his chair in the library at the end of the hall, where he had been waiting.

There was, in Whitey's entrance, a certain air of familiarity, both with his surroundings and toward his host—a truculent consciousness of his own exceeding cleverness, which was Whitey's chief characteristic. Nor was this manner lost upon Mr. Jameson, who had reason to know that, in truth, familiarity was the forerunner of contempt. Had Garritty entered the drawing-room of T. Elihu Banks' home and seated himself in such fashion, T. Elihu would have pitched him immediately from a window, no matter how urgent his need. Instead, Mr. Jameson tendered a match for the cigarette pendant on the pasty-faced visitor's lower lip.

Whitey struck the match, applied it to his cigarette, watching Mr. Jameson's perturbation meanwhile over his shielding hand.

"What's give you the shakes?" he demanded then, as he swung one leg over the chair arm.

In a way, the question was not remarkable under the circumstances. Mr. Jameson's condition was both palpitant and palpable.

"A most unfortunate occurrence," he replied, remaining upon his feet. "Most unfortunate. A— a crisis which confronts both of us, I might say."

"Well, what d'yuh know about that," Whitey answered unenthusiastically. "Where's the jam?"

"A transaction of importance—several transactions, to be explicit—of the last administration, are likely to be held up to public scrutiny. And while there is nothing—ah—out of the ordinary to characterize them, it is very possible that certain details,

necessary to expediency, may be misconstrued as——”

Whitey waved a long white hand.

“Go no further, pal. I get yuh!” he said. “Somebody’s squealed—that’s it, eh?”

“Partly, yes.”

“Didn’t he get his bit?”

“Yes, but——”

“Then let him holler his head off,” advised the truculent Mr. Garritty. “A lot it’ll get him—except an excursion up the river!”

“There is, however, a complicating element,” Mr. Jameson explained. “It has become known to the opposition newspaper.”

“Good-night!” exclaimed Garritty.

“You hadn’t noticed the last few issues of the *Courier*?” the other inquired.

“I don’t bother my head with those hick sheets,” said Garritty. “Jumped you already, have they?”

“They have.”

Mr. Jameson took a turn or two up and down the room, and finally approached the gist of the interview. “There will be another district attorney to try your case,” he husked, trying to make the disclosure dramatic, “unless we do something.”

Whitey straightened in a distinctly unpleasant way.

“So that’s it?” he sneered. “Sometimes it’s a wonder to me you don’t get to talking and meet yourself coming back. Now—just what was *we* expected to do!”

"Tivotson could be managed if—if the other one was out of the way."

"Not me! Not when I can jump to Canada twice as easy!" Whitey's refusal was so final that the district attorney knew Whitey had taken him too entirely at his word.

"I—I meant nothing so drastic," he hastened to state. "I was merely suggesting that perhaps some little occurrence could be arranged which would rebound to Gordon's public discredit, or—or whereby he and his nefarious activity might be confined until after election. He has already been before me to answer for a misdemeanor. Eight years ago I gave him twenty-four hours to get out of town——"

Jameson stopped and backed away from the Garritty who had leaped to his feet. Slit-eyed, head drawn down between his shoulders, Garritty stood staring at him, hate in his cruel hands and his twitching lips.

"Gordon," he snarled, "Jimmy Gordon—the town's amateur bad man! So he's back at last, is he?" His voice became a crooning monotone. "And he's going to slip a new district attorney over on me, is he, and send me up for a stretch?"

He glared palely at Jameson.

"Why couldn't you talk straight for once in your life," he demanded, "and save me that time? See that scar? That's where his —— —— —— got me over the head with a chair, that night I'd 'a' done for him in Hanlon's, for cuttin' in on my game. I been looking for that bird for eight years!"

He turned, and, too weak in the knees to follow, Jameson allowed him to reach the door before he could speak.

"Nothing d-d-drastic," he stuttered. "Nothing——"

Garritty flung a harsh laugh back at him.

"Drastic hell! Pass the word on to your crowd that they can cheer up," said Garritty. "And you can put in your time framin' an alibi for me."

Without moving, Jameson heard the door open and close. Long after his visitor had gone he stood there, staring vacantly before him. At first he tried to convince himself that he had put a wrong construction upon Whitey's threat, but found that ground untenable in remembering Garritty's face. Thereupon he shifted to the other extreme. If violence did result it was Garrity's affair—and Gordon's. He had meant to suggest no such ghastly reprisal.

Just once he thought of a way back which still lay open to him. He got as far as the telephone before his nerve forsook him, and he collapsed in a chair.

Judge Jameson had won considerable fame as a terror at cross-examination. His eloquent forcefulness, dynamic and without mercy, in summing up before a jury, had torn the hope from the eyes of more than one wretched specimen of humanity, who had dared to hope, pitifully jaunty and assured, unto the very eleventh hour. He had been a blast of righteous wrath before which they faltered and hung their heads.

And now "Judge" Jameson could not hold his own head erect. In a way his perspective had become altered. From time to time he shuddered, as if from a chill. To hide those faces which he remembered too vividly now, he covered his face with his hands.

CHAPTER XVII

THE GREAT CARL HARDY

TWO nights later, seated across the room from her, Jimmy Gordon laid aside the second act, which he had finished reading aloud, and lifted his head to Carol Landis with an odd admixture of apologetic self-consciousness and concern.

"Of course, it's still very much in the rough," he ventured; and then, noting how thoughtfully quiet she sat, lapsed into silence himself.

After waiting for two days for him to try again, Carol, unerringly certain as to his emotions the afternoon he called to find her out, had called him up on the telephone, partly because her desire to see him would not brook further delay, partly because she had, that very afternoon, received from Hardy an unbelievably hopeful letter, which she did not immediately mention to him, however, when he arrived at eight in obedience to her summons.

For the excellence, or lack of it, in the second act he had just finished reading, she had little mind for the moment. The first few pages had convinced her that above all else it possessed the "human" note which Hardy wrote must be sustained by her new

discovery to fulfil the great promise of the first act she had sent him. It was her very familiarity with the material which went to form these new scenes which sent through her a wave of pity and a hotter wave of pride.

Never until then had she been able to understand the hunger of the boy to mingle with those who would have none of his society. Even in the days when her sympathy had been readiest and her scorn for those who "dwelt upon the hill" a very real, though carefully concealed, thing in his presence, she had only thought to understand. She pitied that boy's wistful loneliness now, but the pride which her newer discovery had brought tugged at her throat.

The *Courier* extra she had read, and wondered over vastly. Unbelievable though it was, there were moments when she was almost certain that she had surprised Jimmy Gordon in the highly uncharacteristic act of kicking T. Elihu Banks from his doorstep. But now she knew!

Suddenly, without a word, she rose and flew across to him and threw both arms about his neck, drawing his head against her brighter one as impulsively and quite as unconsciously as in other years.

"Jimmy!" she gasped. "And I never suspected you! I thought all along—" she gave up trying to explain coherently, and laughed unsteadily instead. "I never can tell what you are thinking about," she finished accusingly.

And Jimmy, not only because he understood, but also because he felt equally as sure concerning the

impulse which had tightened her arms about his neck, reached up and unwound them, as casually as he had done when an undemonstrative boy.

"You like it?" he ventured again. "It's not too bad?"

She stood a moment, a little disheveled, looking down at him from very brilliant, suddenly embarrassed eyes. Then she went demurely back to her chair.

"What a forward thing for me to do! Please lay it to my temperament, Jimmy," she laughed. But she could not even feign lightness.

"It's wonderful! It's—oh, I'm so absurdly glad. Years ago I was afraid that they'd hurt the very spirit of you beyond all mending. Only a few days ago at the club I thought you were still bitter, still bewildered and unable to understand." She pointed to the script, and startled him by putting into words one of his most intimate thoughts. "I thought you were one of the cast, playing just a little, and—and miserably unhappy part, and instead you were merely watching from the wings. And now you've written it there—not in cynicism—not with satirical meanness of spirit. Jimmy, when you grin that crooked little absent-minded grin, are you—are you laughing hysterically at all of us deep within yourself?"

She had seen him flush many times at her efforts to peer behind his preoccupation, but never so hotly before.

"And I never dreamed it until now," she murmured. "You sober-faced, blinking fraud!"

There seemed to be nothing for him to say in response to that. He continued to smile. And thereupon she remembered Hardy's letter.

" . . . Rarely read a first act by an inexperienced playwright which was so finished in form and so full of promise. If your new discovery (you failed to mention his name) can maintain in his succeeding acts the note of simplicity which makes his work so convincing I feel certain that we have found the vehicle for which we have been searching. When in Warchester (if possible I shall see you within two weeks) will it be feasible to discuss this with the author in person?"

There was a sardonic quality in Jimmy's expression as he listened to that letter. Carol almost surprised it as she looked up, at the end, flushed herself and triumphant.

"Bless his heart!" she said. "And think of it, Jimmy. Hardy—the great Carl Hardy! But I knew he'd be just like that!"

Indeed, Jimmy was thinking of that very person, trying hard not to wish the man less worthy of the ecstatic note in her voice. Before all other men Jimmy respected and valued Carl Hardy. Suddenly he had learned also what it was to envy him.

"He is a—a very courteous gentleman," he answered slowly.

The girl's perplexed frown passed so fleetly before a flash of amusement that he utterly failed to notice it.

"He's splendid!" she cried. "Wait until you really

know him. Oh, I've never been quite so happy in all my life as I am over his letter."

"I should be—I am a very lucky young man," Jimmy said.

But, in taking his leave a few minutes later, he restrained amazingly the elation which a struggling author might have been expected to display upon the tentative acceptance of his first play.

Because she seemed not to feel his mood, he congratulated himself that it was well hidden, and he was turning away when a stifled cry from her checked him. She was pointing stiffly at a patch of shadow on the lawn.

"Someone was standing there—back of that tree," she whispered. "A man who ran."

Jimmy's eyes strained in the direction of her outstretched arm. Puzzled, he descended the steps.

"If he was there," he came back to dismiss the occurrence lightly, for he believed he knew the explanation of it, "he's taken himself off in a hurry. But if you're nervous——"

She laughed, not quite easily.

"I'm not," she assured him. "Only—only please don't leave the lighted streets for some dark shortcut on your way back, will you, Jimmy? And don't think that I'm womanishly absurd."

He promised, and promptly forgot all about it in a recollection of the glowing face with which she had read Hardy's letter. And so Hardy had planned to be in Warchester in two weeks. Well, who could help but care for Carl Hardy!

And then, with the alley which ran past the Palace Theater to the door of Hanlon's Hotel yawning black before him, curiously enough he remembered her warning and his promise, and smiled over it gravely. He stood an instant, wondering if she had already promised Hardy.

His heels rang measuredly upon the alley pavement. He had forgotten again the blotch of shadow upon the lawn, and the man who ran. And then there was a stir, soundless and sibilant, close behind him.

Crouching, he sprang into the deeper shadow against the left wall. Hugging that blank, brick surface, he crouched and ran for the hotel lights, utterly without shame for his surrender to instinct. And he had crossed the open court, and was reaching out to fling open the door when his hat left his head as if plucked therefrom by an invisible hand.

Behind him a yellow flame lanced the darkness. In the narrow confines of the alley a gun roared deafeningly. Mechanically and unheroically Jimmy stooped in his stride to pick up his hat. He heard the second ball thud into the door above him, waist-high, had he been erect.

And then the door was open, and, with the flood of light that dazzled his eyes, Hanlon came out like an avalanche. His mad rush swept Jimmy aside like a bit of chaff. Like an avalanche, he went roaring down the alley.

CHAPTER XVIII

SMALL TOWN STUFF

AFTER he had picked himself up, Jimmy Gordon stood for a few moments motionless before the hotel entrance, gazing from the hole in his hat to the one waist-high in the heavy door of Hanlon's, with an emotion so peculiarly complex that he was entirely unaware of the little knot of people which began instantly to collect about him.

Like flies to tainted meat, the first gunshot, the first hint of violence, had brought them swarming from what, a breath before, had seemed empty courtyard and emptier alleyway; hard-faced, wise-eyed figures, murmurous without being noisy about it, and differing greatly from the crowd which a public street accident invariably provokes, in that they maintained a truly notable self-restraint. The central figure, obviously uninjured, was subjected neither to absurd interrogations anent his condition, nor called upon to lend an ear to unsought opinion concerning his assailant. In truth, so unobtrusive were they that Hanlon had come stumping back up the alley and jostled roughly through to his side before Jimmy realized that he was no longer alone upon the scene. Hanlon

hooked one arm through his elbow and led him inside the hotel.

There was a fresh scar on the inner surface of the door below the bullet-hole; a long and jagged splinter lay on the "office" floor, torn loose by that bullet; and beyond, at the opposite side of the room, fragments of plaster from the wall.

Jimmy stood staring at this minor damage, unimpeachable confirmation of the entirely serious and businesslike intent of the one in whose hand the gun had roared. Humorously aghast when he lifted his eyes, Jimmy's expression became sheepish as he perceived the fierce anxiety in Hanlon's regard.

"I'm all right," he said, hastily reassuring. "I leaned over to pick up my hat just before he fired the second time. The first one—" He seemed to find the explanation too preposterously theatrical for words, and merely pointed shamefacedly at the hole in his hat.

But there was no visible softening in Hanlon's features, nor did his rigid body relax. Instead, his wooden leg thumped most mightily upon the floor as he sprang toward a window behind that chair toward which the younger man turned. And yet, quick as he was—and there was a ferocious instantaneousness in his action—the white-faced waiter whose body looked soft and flabby was incredibly quicker. He leaped and drew the shade against the outer blackness of the night, and then moved the chair farther down the wall.

At that the editor of the *Courier* stood and gazed

from one face to the other. Hanlon's was as bleak as a wind-worn wall of rock, and as dire. Upon the waiter's countenance there was nothing readable. Many a time Jimmy had seen him spread a fresh cloth in the dining-room with a greater display of emotion. And suddenly he felt unconscionably foolish.

Somehow, up to that point, the incident had impressed him as freakishly unreal; it had all happened too swiftly to be definitely dismaying. And now, this last precaution, the pulling of the shade, seemed little short of farcical. With the disappearance of the faintly crooked deprecatory grin, with which he had first faced Hanlon, his color heightened, until more than anything else he suggested a man self-consciously realizing himself to be the butt of a practical joke.

"See here, Pegleg," he expostulated, surprised to find that his voice was not quite steady. "Why, man, you don't mean that you think those bullets were really intended for me!"

"For whom, thin?" demanded Hanlon.

Jimmy blinked at that laconic abruptness.

"I—I'm sure I don't know," he faltered. "I thought, perhaps, some of your precious patrons had developed a mutual distaste for each other, or—or——"

A look passing wonder crossed his face, and he broke off speaking to grope dizzily behind him. Chancing to glance again at the door, blazed waist-high by the second ball, he had experienced an in-

explicable faintness in the pit of his stomach. Hanlon nodded crisply in comprehension.

"Ye'll do bettther sittin' down," he said, "till ye're steadier in the knees. 'Twas a dir-rtty shot, sweetly placed—the first wan was hurried." He turned to the white-aproned waiter, who had begun to move toward the door. "Ye'll bide a bit," he ordered; and then as shortly to Jimmy: "Now, unless ye feel too little like talkin'——"

Hanlon's attitude toward the occurrence began to be very clear, and there was little excuse to misconstrue the meaning in his unfinished suggestion. But when Jimmy, in a fashion half-puzzled and wholly out of countenance, began his recital with that moment when he had hesitated at the mouth of the alley, Hanlon checked him impatiently.

"At the beginnin', an' ye don't mind," he snapped.

So, after a moment's thought, Jimmy began farther back, with a report of T. Elihu's second visit to the *Courier* office, and an almost facetious explanation of the business which had brought him there.

"Thirty thousand was his figure, Pegleg," he said, "and a very handsome and liberal one, I'd call it. You'll admit that the temptation was considerable. If I hadn't known that Tivotson was waiting on the stairs, to help escort the august gentleman to the street level, I don't know but what I might——" He laughed, but Pegleg did not join in his amusement. Instead, a light, which disturbed him more than vaguely, flashed for an instant in those polished agate eyes.

Without comment, Hanlon waited until the younger man made mention of the man in the shadow on Carol Landis's lawn—the man who ran—and the girl's admonishment to avoid the byways and stick to the highways which were well lighted; but there he gave voice to a savagely exultant exclamation, and wheeled toward the waiter.

"There was never any doubt from the beginning," he rumbled. "'was a waste of time, but ye'll waste no more."

Immediately watching the change that came over that waiter's face, Jimmy felt his spine crawl. Theatrical or not, farcical or otherwise, up to that point, the evening's events achieved suddenly, even in his eyes, a sinister aspect. Until then Jimmy had never seen that white-aproned one smile, nor known him to offer speech. Now the contented cruelty of his grin was as amazing as the perfect precision of his words and accent.

"Am I to reason with him," the waiter asked softly, "and try to convince him of the error of his ways?"

The wicked leer in the query held Jimmy dumb. He waited to protest against such dispassionate discussion of a man's disposal, to cry out against this mummerly which was so unexpectedly, so insanely ambitious of a tragic mask. But Hanlon maintained a sort of surface complacency; even with black, blind rage struggling for utterance.

"Till I give ye the worrud, ye livid-lipped mon-goose," he answered, "till I give ye the worrud, ye'll

keep yere fingers from his throat. Ye'll find him first, and when ye do ye'll report back here to me. I'm eager like for a worruld in the gintleman's ear meself."

And Jimmy, still unable to speak, sat and watched the waiter lay aside his white apron and turn toward the door. He noticed how the man's hands hung palms out, noticed his changed gait. There was fascination in those light footfalls. And then, after the door had opened and closed, he shot to his feet and started to follow; realized the weak futility of that impulse; whirled to find Pegleg watching him. All but a word or two was hushed by the look upon Pegleg's face.

"You can't turn that—that beast loose, Pegleg," he exclaimed. "Good God, man, it's—it's ridiculous—preposterous! It's mad! It's opera-bouffe gone mad! And he licked his lips as he went out, as though he were already tasting blood."

Pegleg's calmness hushed him.

"So ye're in earnest at last, are ye?" he asked, a strange tinge of reproach in his voice. "'Tis no longer merely entertaining an' amusin'-like to you?" He laughed an ugly chuckle, grew quickly sober again, and jerked a thumb toward the fresh blaze on the door.

"An' was that a bit av absurdity, too?" he inquired. "Was that intirely ridiculous? Faith, an' ye've never seen a man die, have ye, who's afther got it through the belt? Pfaugh! 'Tis a sick place to be shot!"

Thereupon Jimmy was possessed of a strange conviction. Indeed, Hanlon had spoken accurately. Until that moment, in spirit he had been nothing more or less than a quietly amused onlooker in Warchester, who had thought merely to aggravate a situation or two for his own private and whimsical purpose. In all that had taken place since his return, he had been conscious only of that element of human comedy, valuable indeed to him, which seemed to yield harmlessly enough to his desire.

He came to believe now that the threat of violence which was stalking not himself, but the poor, unknown enthusiast, who crack-brained no doubt in the first place, and inflamed to hatred by the *Courier's* lighthearted attacks upon T. Elihu's immaculateness, had fired at him, was as utterly a thing of his own creation. He was convinced that the blame was his, if violence did result. And Pegleg, his suspicions already stirred on another occasion, saw the guilty consternation upon his face, and grew very, very sure of his ground.

He leaned forward to put a hand upon the young man's knee.

"Jimmy, lad," he said, "just once ye've lied to me—just once, these last few days, because ye have not told me the whole truth. Sur-re an' your own affairs are your own, an' ye wish to keep them to yerself. But it shames me to meself to have been so easily fooled.

"Ye've been home but a little time, reckoned in days. More in hours and more than that in minutes,

an' I've known many a man, through inattention to detail and lack av observation, to achieve a pre-matuer eternity in the fraction av a second, 'tis true. I should have guessed it at the first second I saw ye, yet ye fooled me, what with yer blinkin' lids and lazy grin. I thought to welcome ye back tired av the husks, and mabby with the taste av failure grown bitter in yere belly. An' instead, 'twas good fortune ye'd found—ye were certian to do that—and shame to me perspicacity. But ye'll talk now, an' I'll listen."

A gust of confusion flushed Jimmy's thin face. Guiltier than ever, and more than ever self-conscious, he sat trying to meet Hanlon's level regard. And then, without defense or comment, in a halting fashion that matched the quizzical look that had come back into his eyes, he "talked" as Hanlon bade him.

At times the huge and grizzled figure opposite him nodded his head understandingly, while Jimmy spoke with transparent jauntiness of prolonged periods when even "husks" had been extremely acceptable. Oftener he listened with downcast eyes and bushy eyebrows drawn together in a beetling frown, so that the speaker saw little of the glow which a mention of "As Ye Sow" and "Unless Ye Believe" kindled in his eyes—two metropolitan successes credited to the pen of one Gordon James, a playwright essentially American, both in form and philosophy. He was still frowning when Jimmy apprized him of the real errand which had brought him back to Warchester,

and halted there, lamely apologetic once more.

"You mustn't believe that I hit upon the idea with a thought to patronize, or—or caricature—or lampoon, Pegleg," he attempted, finding the huge man's silence unendurable.

And then Pegleg's head came up. He was smiling enigmatically, though his lips were still grim.

"To obsarve and chronicle the city of Warchester," he proceeded to make of the explanation an amiably satirical digest, "and turn her into a play-act to make a holiday for the multitudes." He nodded again, his eyes twinkling momentarily. "'Twas like ye. Yours was a peculiar brand av cussedness always. Always ye had to put yere hand into the fire to find out that the fire burned. Hearsay never satisfied ye; second-hand knowledge was never for the likes av ye.

"I could tell ye how glad I am; I could say I knew ye'd do it some day, only there is too much language squandered every day without me indulging in loquacious transparencies. I could even regret the pity I've wasted on ye, and the hungry hopes I've had that ye'd win through, but 'tis something else I've in mind—wan point that is not so clear to me, nor to you, either, I'm thinkin'.

"Ye say that ye wrote an act that once ye lived, some eight years ago, and, by the saints, didn't I watch ye live it! Ye say ye've come back to lave this community finish yere play for ye, because it must be real—because it must be as true to type as the part ye lived yerself. And yet ye sat there, a minute

back, and believed that ye were alone responsible for that——” He indicated the plaster spattered by the ball on the floor. “Aye, lad, I saw it in yere eyes. In yere eyes ’twas an unforeseen and annoyin’ development which ye believed ye should and could have anticipated and prevented.

“Faith, ye’ve become twisted about. Y’ve lost yere old tr-rick av clear reason. Perfessin’ yourself eager to write whatever was provided for yere pencil, because yere the same boy who wore fringe to his pants in the pursuit av knowledge which ye believed was essential, already ye’ve been thinkin’ to persuade this town to a performance which fits yere own preconceived notions av what such a nice orderly performance should be. Ah, lad, I tell ye now, you’re not stage-manager enough for that—you nor I, Elihu Banks, either!”

They sat gazing earnestly into each other’s eyes, Jimmy’s alight not only with startled appreciation of the justice of the crafty criticism, but anticipation as well for that which most certainly it must preface; Pegleg’s aglow with the fervor of his preachment.

“But it was all sheer comedy,” Jimmy argued flatly, at length. “Even T. Elihu’s visit, and my disgraceful conduct toward him, and Tivotson. Why, even his offer of hush money——”

“Ye think so?” Hanlon’s voice rose until it boomed through the room. “Ye think so An’ from which point av view—yere newly acquired wan based upon a balance in the bank and several tr-runks full

av clothes, or that av the lean an' hungry divil ye were—in the prologue av the piece? Thin what about old Dave Landis? By the same token, was the willin' av the *Courier* to you, which made the visit av the great Mr. Banks an unplisant necessity—was that a travisty, too? Faith in retribution is going out av fashion, but I am one of the simple-minded who still hold to the belief. I witnessed that will, just as, for years, I witnessed the slow ruin av the man who made it."

He paused as if to give the other a fair chance to reply, but Jimmy sat silent, staring hard into Hanlon's seamed face.

"Y've mixed up yere viewpoints," the latter went on, when it was clear to him that the other did not mean to speak, "ye'll need to go back to that av the bhoy ye were eight years ago, whin thirty thousand would have been something more than a joke to chuckle over within yerself, to regain yere needed perspective. Yet if humor ye still insist the offer av that triflin' sum to be, then we'll consider the girl called Melody, who found living hard and dying easy. Ye've not forgot the day ye searched for a man to preach her funeral service, I'll warrant, for 'twas not so long ago ye set forth on that errand. No? An' yet ye fail to remimber a night eight years ago—a night they gave ye twenty-four hours to leave town? That hole in your hat? That bullet splash there in me wall! Lad—lad, eight years ago, she whom we knew as Melody gave Whitey Garritty the cue for them two shots that missed ye tonight whin

she sint a chair rockettin' across a table into his bad face, and saved ye alive to write plays.

"What?" Jimmy's voice rang like a shot.

Hanlon stopped him with an imperious gesture.

"Who else did ye think it was? He promised then—he's promised often enough since that he'd one day get ye. And has it not been made easy for him, and safe?"

Pegleg sat and shook his head from side to side.

"Ye are a grave disappointment to me. Ye never took yerself seriously—praise God for that, for ye'd have been dead by now if ye had—but, Jimmy, ye've underestimated the town that never would have aught av ye, the town that taught ye half av one hard lesson, and to which ye claimed to return shtill a student."

Again he had to lift a preemptory hand.

"Aye, I know! Small town stuff, I've heard it called with supreme scorn. Small town stuff!—and ye'll not endeavor to protest till I have finished, for 'twill avail ye little! 'Tis a favorite phrase av the sophisticated dwellers in this metropolis or that; a patronizing estimate—an' I do not mean to throw yer words in yer face—av the imitation, inadequate wickedness av provincial places.

"Pfaugh! Blind fools! The wan worst community I ever knew was a town av four hundred souls. Aye, ye're still younger than I thought, for by the blessed grace av youth, ye've half forget what once ye knew to yere sorrow. Meanness is not a matther of geography, nor does viciousness depend

upon population. Human nature is human nature, irrespective av longitude or latitude, or the last cinsus report. Jimmy, lad, ye've felt foolish this night, ye've felt ashamed av yerself for participatin' in a performance so theatrical an' silly, when ye should have been thankin' hiven that ye ar're not lyin' yonder on the pavement coughin' to keep yere throat clear av blood.

"But ye'll take it more serious-like now—or would ye still be thinkin' to change the greed av T. Elihu Banks, the hope av the Civic Reform party for U. S. Senator, by a few minor alterations av yere play-dialogue? Would ye still think to correct District Attorney Jameson's interpretation av his role, and recast him as an honest man, with a man's instincts and courage, instead av the desperation av a cornered rat?"

Jimmy sat gazing at the floor.

"I understand," he said heavily. "You speak as though you were sure, and yet——"

"Ther-re ar're iliments av dr-rama which ye have overlooked. Shall I be afther sketchin' for ye, without claim to literary excellence, a scene or two which, mayhap, ye have failed to imagine?"

Jimmy signed with a shake of his head the needlessness of such a course.

"I understand," he repeated slowly. "You think Banks went to Jameson after he saw me, and that Jameson went to Garritty."

"Garritty went to Jameson," Hanlon corrected him, "at Jameson's order, or to be choice av words

an' their meanin', at Jameson's invitation. And Jameson told him that there might be a new district-attorney to try his case, come the next session av court, what with the return av Jimmy Gordon to Warchester."

The editor of the *Courier* did not reply immediately. He rose, with an odd air of preoccupation, and paced several times the length of the room and back, his tall body slightly stooped, his thin features averted. Once he stopped and stood rubbing his chin with the tips of his fingers, his back to the huge and grizzled man who watched him with growing trouble in his gaze.

"It's damned disconcerting," he murmured loud enough for Hanlon to hear him, "damned annoying. That was your word, I believe."

Thereupon Hanlon's fierce old eyes were no longer merely troubled. They glistened with a look close akin to actual fright, fear of utter disillusionment. Twice he cleared his throat, yet the voice he summoned, though gruffer than before, was heavy, too, with disappointment.

"I've heard that manny a successful play has been written in a three-room suite overlookin' the Avenynoo," he ventured. "The old belief in the inspiration to be won in an unheated attic was long since proved to be as false as the handicap av three meals a day. An' ye did not come here to embroil yerself in a political vendetta."

Hungrily he waited for his answer. It gave him small comfort when it came.

"That's true," said Jimmy, ruminatingly. "And that's not the worst of it, either. I was thinking—of your criticism of my fickle point of view. I'm afraid, Pegleg, it'll be necessary for me to change the entire plan of my third act."

At that Hanlon's hands gripped the arms of his chair until the knot-like knuckles turned blue. Slowly, then, he came to his feet—tensely. Jimmy wheeled to front him. The face that he presented to Hanlon's eager scrutiny was not the face of the Jimmy Gordon who had attempted an interruption a few minutes before. And as Pegleg had silenced him then, so now he silenced Pegleg. His stiff gait matched the sternness of his pale eyes and slightly crooked lips. There was neither mildness, nor a trace of his old-time perpetual apology upon him.

"Just an opportunist, eh, Pegleg?" His voice held a note of sadness. "And something of a poltroon! Ah, I'd never have believed it of you. I always counted on a more generous estimate—from you and from one other."

The shaggy head bowed.

"Twice ye've fooled me, twice now," he muttered humbly. But his words trembled with exultance. "An' how much have ye got written, already, lad, on yere play-act? For, if ye'll not smile at me curiosity, 'tis keen I am to read it. . . . The play's the thing—aye, the play's the thing! All the world's a stage!"

Jimmy approached the window and shot up the shade, this time without objection from Hanlon. In

the east the sky was graying with the first promise of dawn, and a moment later when Hanlon moved to his side, he saw that the boy's eyes were turned toward that section of the city still designated by the phrase "up on the hill."

It had been upon the old man's tongue to express profound thankfulness that he was not Elihu Banks or District Attorney Jameson that night. One glimpse of the other's face checked him.

Jimmy was thinking of "Old Dave" Landis—and "Old Dave" Landis's daughter. Until then he had never fully realized the measure of her bravery—the measure of her kindness to the boy he had been. How cheerfully, how persistently she had given of her courage. And how matter-of-fact had been his acceptance. It was given to him to know at that moment that tomorrow he would tell her, as best he could. . . .

As he laid one hand upon Hanlon's arm, the sun edged up over the horizon and touched the dingy roofs with rose. Even the scum on the river shimmered and was beautiful.

There was poetry in the soul of the proprietor of Hanlon's place. He had a prophet's clear vision.

"'Tis tomorrow already, lad," he murmured, and pointed with a gnarled forefinger. "Aye—and 'tis not such a bad town afther all."

CHAPTER XIX

JUST JIMMY GORDON

JIMMY went to sleep that morning, almost as soon as his head touched the pillow, and though he was half conscious at times of the presence of Abel who came a-tiptoe once to draw the shades against the bold summer sunshine, and again and again to fuss and putter with them officiously, it was late afternoon before he awakened to find himself possessed of a strange excitement.

For a time he lay motionless, quite unaware either of the hour, or the day, or the week, drowsily trying to reconcile the incident of the previous evening with the humming stillness and his present persistent premonition of an impending event of surpassing glory. He had almost convinced himself that both the strange premonition and the bullet-hole in the door downstairs, were as much a part of a dream as was his recollection of the ringing of many bells, when Abel, entering again, with caution so elaborate that it defeated the end it should have served, since in watching his histrionic effort in the mirror, he blundered into a chair, rolled his eyes, saw that his employer was already awake, and proceeded to set him

right forthwith concerning the latter phenomenon.

Abel bewailed the church chimes, and expressed hope that they had not spoiled "Mr. Goh'don's" slumbers. And at that Jimmy raised himself on one elbow, with a show of haste somewhat startling to the gentleman of color. Of course! No wonder he had wakened with a sense of impending events of large importance. Upon retiring he had entertained a very definite plan for this Sabbath afternoon. But with the first move, which raised him enough to bring the top of the table at the foot of the bed into his range of vision, much of his excitement and happy spontaneity of purpose left him.

There was a letter face up on the table, and the appearance of it was familiar—too disconcertingly, unpleasantly familiar. Long after Abel had shot up the shades, and brought it to him, with the explanation that it had come in on a late mail, had been delivered at the *Courier* office, whence Tivotson had dispatched it, thinking it might be of importance, Jimmy sat gazing at Carl Hardy's letter. And then he laid it aside unopened. It was a disturbing thing—in a way almost portentous—but though his spirits suffered a sudden drop he still clung to his Sabbath plan, or what was left of it. But he no longer felt exhilaration—no longer thrilled at the thought of the adventure.

He rose and dressed with a profound preoccupation that was proof against even Abel's garrulity.

"Ain' goin' see 'at ole boy roun' this heah town again," he heard the gentleman of color declare,

without realizing that he was bewailing the lack of success which had attended the flabby-looking waiter's search for Garritty. "Ain' no need lookin' foh him no mo' heahabouts. 'At boy on his way by now—on his way!"

Jimmy murmured that doubtless such was the case, and gave his entire attention to perfecting the knot of his scarf. Abel was a trifle dashed by his manner. His last observation had impressed him as the best of his many attempts to approach conversationally the wholly delightful topic of his employer's newest bid for notoriety, and the result was definitely discouraging. Therefore he was doubly astonished the next instant at winning his entire attention, by almost no effort at all.

Jimmy had finished with his scarf, and turned. And at the same moment, without a thought that it was to prove in any way a sensation, Abel drew from a side pocket of his coat a small, flat automatic pistol, dull with oil and destructively beautiful, and tendered it quite casually enough, a final touch for an otherwise nicely complete toilet. The effect was electrical—instantaneous. But Jimmy's new bearing, while vastly different, was even less satisfactory than his previous absent-mindedness.

Staring at that compact firearm in Abel's outstretched hand, his face grew redder and redder, until Abel, thinking to read anger in that painful flush, sought to clear himself by placing the blame for the tactless blunder on one higher up.

"Hanlon, he done ordah me to give it to you,"

he explained. "She ain' big, and she ain' bulky. Nobody ain' goin' suspect she there in you pocket at all. But, O my, she *bad*! She *bad* when yuh tuhn her loose!"

Undoubtedly "she" would be. "She" had a blunt and businesslike look; and yet Jimmy's face, instead of exhibiting appreciation of the very certain sense of security which such a possession might be expected to awake, only grew the redder.

On rising, quite automatically his mind had reverted to his first estimate of the encounter with Garritty, if encounter it could be called in the full recollection of his ignominious flight up the alley. The affair of the pistol not only worked a rapid readjustment, but projected another angle of the entire affair as well.

"Damnation!" he ejaculated, and instinctively discreet, Abel drew back the hand which held the offensive object. "This is going altogether too far. With a little more such advertising, Hanlon'll have the thing spread all over town."

At that outburst Abel's confusion was plainly evidenced. He stood and looked hard at his employer, realizing with difficulty that he meant just what he said, and not the exact opposite, as was the inexplicable way of white folks, oftentimes, when humorously inclined.

"All ovah town?" the gentleman of color echoed wonderingly. "You mean—" But he abandoned the question, deciding that the meaning could be none other. "Mist' Goh'don," he said, importantly, "no

advertisin' ain' necessary. Since daybreak this heah community ain' been talkin' of nuthin' else."

Jimmy's hot color began to go, but his manner remained somewhat desperately harassed. So, unobtrusively, Abel slipped the gun out of sight, and busied himself exceedingly, for the nonce, doing nothing at all with a flourish, yet giving the impression of one attending to large affairs too long neglected. And then, at the sound of his employer's sudden laughter, he desisted as suddenly. He wheeled with a thankful expression in his eyes, even hinted hopefully at the pocket in which lay the gun, but still laughing, Jimmy checked him with a gesture.

"Is Hanlon in?" he asked, conscious of the countless times he had asked the colored man the same question.

Abel shook his head.

"He ain' been home sense mawnin'. He told me to remind you to be roun' tonight. Some gentlemen comin' in foh a little 'lection conference."

"Of course." And after a period of thought: "Tell him I'll be back. And, Abel, when you return his pistol to him, perhaps it would be just as well if you explained that I forgot it—left it lying on the table here—do you see?"

It had been Jimmy Gordon's firm intent to make his way into the district which lay up on the hill by the shorter, more conspicuous route that led past St. Luke's, and T. Elihu's portals—and, yes, the Latham front veranda itself. In view of the reception ac-

corded his passage along Main Street the day before, he prided himself that this resolution savored almost of dare-deviltry; and furthermore, for several days, a whimsical wish had been upon him to verify an ancient memory.

And now he knew that he would not dare essay that highway. Thus had the pistol wrought upon him. Standing there on the threshold, quizzically hesitant, it was on his tongue to ask Abel's opinion of such craven weakness. And then a new surge of eagerness o'erbore his desire for psychological discussion—even with the gentleman of color. Waking he had known this was to be his day of splendid adventure.

He left so hurriedly that Abel stood, mouth agape, staring after. In his entire lifetime Abel had not yet discovered a reasonable excuse for haste.

In speaking of the wide report which Whitey Garrity's attack upon the owner of the *Courier* had already enjoyed, Abel Thompson, even with the racial habit of happy exaggeration strong upon him, had, if anything, failed to do the matter justice. For, having flowed like spilled quicksilver to the four quarters of the city, the news had ignored mere municipal boundaries, to penetrate even the outlying rural regions which drew upon Warchester not only for political propaganda, but the more complex and sordid sensations as well.

And it was a much garbled rumor which had gone abroad. That would seem, on the face of it, to be a tediously obvious statement, for rumor is always

garbled, else where the enjoyment in indulging in it. But the wide and peculiar variety of the story's ramifications may be best indicated, perhaps, by particular mention of two of them, selected not at random from the many.

At that same hour (two o'clock in the morning) when the Reverend Watson Duncan, industriously plying a pencil beneath a shaded lamp that shed a graciously mellow light upon the sermon which he meant to deliver the next evening, was called to the telephone to hear that the person with whose iniquity that very sermon was most concerned, had departed violently this vale of sin and sorrow; it was also reported to District Attorney Jameson, verbally, as he stood in his doorway, in slippers and dressing-gown, that the owner of the *Courier* had not only met a sudden end, but that one Garritty, the means thereto, lay incarcerated, already charged with the crime.

It goes without saying that both Mr. Duncan and Mr. Jameson were distinctly shocked. In what different degrees it is not given to state. For there is more to be gained in a contemplation of their changed emotions, when, later, both reports were nailed as false.

Mr. Jameson after a frantic and futile effort to get Mr. Banks on the wire, had locked himself in his room, whence to the amazement of his family, from time to time there emanated muffled sounds not unlike a groan. And yet, a half hour following the receipt of the second report, a denial of the first, he

emerged again, sleekly combed and garbed with dignity. But his amazing conduct did not stop there. That morning for the first time in a period of years, with an air of weariness he expressed his intention of accompanying his wife to church.

On the other hand, the Reverend Watson Duncan was most unecclesiastically short with Mrs. Duncan, delicate of health, who by chance elected to come down to breakfast that morning—a task she rarely essayed.

Mr. Duncan had thought to spare her until then. After listening to the first news of his stepson's death, he had gone straight to bed with several apt phrases concerning the wrath of a righteous God running through his head. Work on the sermon he abandoned since, naturally, it need never be finished. And so, with the second bulletin which effected such a change in Mr. Jameson, he was forced to resume that task again, with all haste, and make the most of the scant interval which was left before the hour of morning service should call him to minister to his flock.

Truly the ways of Providence are inscrutable. Mrs. Duncan had never known her lord and master to be as irritable as he was throughout that day. And yet he who figured most prominently in those exceedingly conflicting reports was convinced by mid-afternoon, that there was one house where rumor had not yet come. The street that had led him there, chosen for reasons of obscurity, had proved to be beset with comment and curiosity. But as he climbed

the steps of the renovated old Landis place, searching the girl's eyes for a sign of apprehension, he surprised nothing but a serenely intimate gleam of welcome therein. It occurred to him that he felt not unlike an harassed pilgrim who, after leagues of travail, had at length won sanctuary. He had some mind to convey this to her in words, but realized in time that the parallel would entail some explanation, and therefore discarded it.

And, perversely, that was the only topic which presented itself to him at the moment—that and one other which, resolutely on the tip of his tongue ever since he had left Pegleg's place, he now found he could not voice.

She was busy sewing. "A shocking Sabbath desecration," she named it, "—but it's really become a habit with me. Sunday's about the only time I've had, for a number of years, to repair rips and tears. And I'd never have a whole garment to wear, if I left it to Louise."

And there, her fingers occupied, she let conversation languish before it was fairly begun, nor seemed to find the ensuing silence awkward or uncomfortable.

She was all in white—some sort of fluffy white stuff that stuck out quaintly in the skirt. That Jimmy noted first, and approved of, gravely. Her stockings were white, as were her shoes. But there was mischief in the demure angle of her head, the demure crossing of her ankles.

How often she had sewed like that, in the other

years. She was always repairing this old garment or that, but always lightheartedly, always with optimism, in spite of the doubtful success of many previous ventures. She had even patched him up, when he became too ragged.

Jimmy Gordon! That took him directly to thoughts of those two Broadway successes—and Carl Hardy. He sat staring down at his feet, pondering absent-mindedly—wondering if it would make any difference to her if she were to know that it was Gordon James, that highly successful though elusive playwright, who sat there, instead of Jimmy Gordon, black sheep, ne'er-do-well, the town's reproach.

Immediately a great temptation beset him—a temptation to abandon that ill-starred and erstwhile miserable identity to his ill-chosen ways. As Gordon James (he shook his head, denying to himself that there was any lurking thought of snobbishness or conceit in the inspiration) he could speak words little becoming the lips of Jimmy Gordon, penniless, improvident publicist.

And with that thought in mind, he raised his eyes. And then his heart began to hammer in his throat. She was laying aside her work-basket. Star-eyed, lips parted, she had been watching him. And now he followed her, as she rose. Her voice was deliciously low, candidly, tenderly mirthful, and very, very close to tears.

"No," she said. "Not Gordon James, Jimmy. I want—just Jimmy Gordon—to say it to me!"

CHAPTER XX

THE HUMBLE EXALTED

QUITE oblivious at first to the unbelievable import of her words, Jimmy Gordon stood so long staring down into her shining eyes that she needs must laugh, at length, at the expressions that went blundering across his face, though, indeed, the mirth itself was softly tremulous.

"Carl Hardy!" he stammered. "He told you . . . you *knew* all the time!"

She nodded, delightedly.

"—But *he* didn't tell me. Do you think there was any need of explanation when he brought me that first act—the one he offered to buy from you years ago and advised you not to sell—and asked me what I thought? Gordon James!

"Why, I'd have known it was your work, even if I'd never seen it before. I—I always used to tell you that I never could anticipate you—never quite knew what you were going to do or say, didn't I? That was very, very dishonest flattery. You're the most transparent individual in the world, though I—I am beginning to wonder how much longer you're going to keep me waiting before you. . . ."

Minutes later she raised her head and saw the glorified incredulity of his face. It brought a lump to her throat and quick tears to her eyes.

"Jimmy!" she faltered. "Jimmy, as much as that! And you never even guessed? Oh, my dear, my dear! Why, I decided I'd marry you, years ago, the night you had to go away." The unsteady little catch went from her voice and left it grave. "To take care of you, Jimmy—so—so now you'd better tell me everything that happened last night! And don't try to make light of it, please, for if you do I'll only worry more. That's—that's how I used to know when you were in a particularly bad scrape."

Six o'clock came, and on the minute, like an automaton, in crisp black and white, a maid appeared in the open doorway of the Latham residence, which fronted on Warchester's "most exclusive residential thoroughfare." But the cool nod with which Evelyn Latham was accustomed to indicate her pleasure was so long delayed that Lloyd Jameson, occupying on the steps the lowly place from which he had never been promoted, realized that the lady was engrossed with matters other than the serving of refreshments, and so (and from no fleshly motive) at last ventured, almost apologetically, to bring the matter to her attention.

"It's six o'clock, Evelyn," he suggested. "Shall—shall she bring the tea things now?"

All that afternoon Lloyd's bearing had been oddly absent and subdued, a condition too unremarkable

to provoke notice or comment, however, for he had long been humble and disconsolate in Evelyn Latham's presence.

Of all of that customary Sabbath throng, he was the only one who had not been drawn close to the wicker divan by the sensational disclosures of Sidney Banks, who, with a serene confidence born of long custom, perhaps, shared it with the daughter of the house. And yet, in the glance which Evelyn turned not toward the maid, but upon the bulky figure slumped in dejection on the steps, there was something of tender, intuitive expectation, something of the light with which ladies of old were wont to favor the as yet unproven knight of her choice.

They all failed to notice that glance, but if they had, its peculiar quality would have eluded them. Such an emotion was commonly known to be anything but characteristic of Evelyn Latham, the cool and poised and ultra-correct; and by no flight of fancy was the bulky figure anything but unheroic!

"If you please, Lloyd," she drawled, the gaze lingering upon his bowed head for the fraction of a second. Then she turned to give again all her interest to the one whom Lloyd had interrupted. The singleness of her attention was distinctly flattering, and yet her words seemed to have acquired a new briskness, which, to one less self-certain than Sidney, might have suggested a crafty cross-examiner blandly leading a lying witness toward the pitfall of prying. "And you believe it was over this girl, Melody," she prompted, "that the trouble first started, years ago."

With that, as if stung into action, Lloyd lifted his head, and Sidney, mistaking the stolid gesture for one of protest, waved a mock relentless hand.

"Murder will out, my boy," he laughed down at him, "and besides, confession is good for the soul." And then, to Evelyn, and the rest of the throng, who were hanging upon each syllable:

"Exactly, and I don't merely believe it, I know it. For we were there that night at Hanlon's, Lloyd and I. Just a harmless little fling, you see—a look at the seamy side of things, as it were, though we thought it was dare-devilish enough then, Heaven knows.

"And *he* was there, too, at one of the little round table, with this girl called Melody when—when Garritty came in. It's Garritty, you know, that they suspect fired those shots at him last night in the Palace Theater alleyway. Garritty's one of those strange products of the streets, reckless and lawless sometimes, and yet capable of—I suppose a certain fineness is the word. And Gordon—there's a certain code in such matters—and he had overstepped. At that there might not have been trouble, but Gordon said something to him, just a word or two, as Garritty happened past their table, and then—well, they said Garritty would have finished him right then, as he almost did last night, if I—if we hadn't interfered. Before Garritty could get his gun free, the girl felled him with a chair. And Gordon—I got him out through a side door reserved for just such emergencies, and glad enough to go. So you see

... ." Sidney was about to indulge in a dramatically conclusive flourish, when the defection of his audience spoiled the effort entirely, and to put it with time-honored exactitude, compelled him to feel that all was not well.

Throughout the vivid recital Lloyd had maintained his dejected silence. But with the mention of the "side door," and the insinuated ignominy of Jimmy Gordon's escape, an incoherent ejaculation was wrung from his lips. Evelyn turned, with one or two others who heard, in time to see him shake his head again, like a bear beset by hornets, before he started to rise with a sort of prodigious desperation.

And now, confronting Sidney, and Sidney's suddenly dumfounded audience, though he saw nothing but the blurred face of his hostess, hot and miserable and humble still, he addressed himself to her, and achieved, all unwittingly, the heroic.

"That's not the truth," he blurted, speaking blindly and bitterly. "That's a lie, like every other story that's ever been told about Jimmy Gordon's scrapes in this town.

"We were there that night—yes, and he was, later, but not with her. Because *we* were with her; we *went* there with her and a friend of hers called Rose! Sidney picked her up the week we were rehearsing that show we gave for charity. And the night of the performance she brought around a friend for me, and—and we went to Hanlon's."

Lloyd's eyes were bereft of hope as he sustained

Evelyn Latham's level regard. Nor was it strange that he failed to notice even vaguely, how strangely her face had begun to shine from within. Accepting Sidney's jocular reference to confession as a truism, Lloyd had not yet unburdened himself to an extent that was evidenced in any pronounced uplift of spirit. He gulped and pushed on.

"We—we were going to show them a good time!" he said, with unconsciously savage satire. "Of course nothing like Henry's in Manhattan, where—where everybody had to be a good Indian; but the best—or worst—Warchester afforded. And we did think we were gay dogs—regular dare-devils. We even thought, all along, that we'd suggested the party, when, all along, they'd arranged it for us. They introduced us to Garritty, a mean, sneakin' crook, and others like him. We got into a poker game. The girls sat on our chair-arms and signaled the cards we held! And we'd lost more money than we had with us, more than we could pay up in months, and signed some IOU's besides, when Gordon came in.

"He had been standing outside in the rain, waiting to see *you* come out, I suppose." Lloyd's voice was forced and dogged; and suddenly he was no longer unaware of the softly rosy glow in Evelyn Latham's face. More miserable than before, he even believed he knew what lay behind it.

"He must have seen us go into Hanlon's, and known we were fools! Because he followed us. He stood and watched, till he was sure, and then he—

called Garritty, and said the game was crooked! I wouldn't have dared—that doesn't mean much—but not many men would have dared. He didn't have a gun. Garritty did. And Garritty would have shot him down unarmed if the girl called Melody hadn't knocked him out with a chair. That much of what you've just heard was true. And then the place was raided. The police came banging on the door. And *he—he* got *us* out, through a side-door, before they broke the other one in. He got us out, but they caught him. And my father gave him twenty-four hours to get out of town. I could have cleared him, and I kept quiet. I—I knew he wouldn't tell!"

The maid had come and gone, leaving behind the wicker tea-service, with its squat pot and fragile cups, and basket of vari-colored cakes. And still no one moved, or offered to speak, till Sidney dared to lift his eyes to those of the rigid girl beside him. And thereupon, whatever had been upon his lips, whatever word of denial or protest, was hushed. In a silence still unbroken, and ugly of a sudden, he rose and strode heavily down the steps. And, one by one, tacitly accepting the attitude of the girl left alone on the divan as one of dismissal, the rest of that Sabbath throng mumbled an uncomfortable leave-taking and departed. As a chubby Colossus might stand with the monstrous din of that catastrophe still filling his ears, after he had pulled the heavens down about him, Lloyd stood and watched them go. At length Evelyn Latham and the unheroic figure alone remained.

There was a certain serenity in her silence. Lloyd found the quiet eventually unbearable. He stood for a time staring at his boots, before he again goaded himself to speech.

"I've been trying to tell you this—ever since he came back," he mumbled drearily. "But I was too—too much of a coward till now. He's always cared for you, everybody knew he was crazy about you, except yourself."

"I knew it," she interrupted softly.

Again he shook his head. It is doubtful whether he even heard her.

"And now—now——" He drew a long, long breath. "Well, now I guess I'll be going along home."

"But I want you to stay," she expostulated with panic haste. "The—the tea——"

Dully he seated himself on the top step; he rose again at her hesitant bidding, and obeyed the gesture that seated him on the divan at her side.

And thus was the lowly exalted, in the moment that he had thought to brave the abyss. Yet even he was not given to know immediately the height he had achieved—not until a small hand, cool and aloof no longer, but warm and eager, seeking diligently, found his.

Dusk came and darkness, which yielded reluctantly to the lights that lined Warchester's chief residential thoroughfare. And the water in the tea-pot grew cold.

A tall thin figure, appearing from the direction

of the orchard behind the Reverend Watson Duncan's white cottage, strode nearer with quick steps that rang on the flagging. And as he seemed to pause before her home, quizzically contemplative, even in the shadow, Evelyn Latham recognized him; and no longer poised and deliberate, but rather disheveled and flushed, yanked (there is no other word for it) her companion to his feet.

The three met at the junction of the Latham gravel path and the sidewalk. There they stood for several moments, exceedingly congenial, apparently, for laughter and fragmentary bits of sentences were indistinguishably intermingled. And then, from the top step of the Latham veranda, Evelyn watched them, one tall and slightly stooping, one short and plump but very erect, pass the Church of St. Luke's arm in arm and disappear down the hill.

Judge Jameson was alone in his library when the front door, slamming, heralded his son's returned that night.

And Judge Jameson tried to hold his shoulders back and force a smile as Lloyd entered the room, until a glimpse of his son's face startled him half erect. It promised a sensation—and the only sensation of which the Judge could conceive at that moment, left him sick with guilt.

Many times Lloyd in imagination had approached that moment and found it impossible. It was astonishing how easily, and happily, he faced it now.

“ . . . He got caught helping us to get away.” He

repeated it all, as steadily as he could. "And that's why Garritty tried to kill him last night. I—I wanted to tell you . . . I'd have told you, long ago, only I guess there's a streak of cowardice in me, But now you know, and he knows, too."

Judge Jameson moved ever so little.

"You told him?" he mumbled.

Lloyd's voice raced on, in explanation: "He walked down from Lathams' with me tonight. He laughed over it and said it was a funny scrape. He laughed, father, think of that . . . and I—I'm going to marry Evelyn Latham!"

Nothing could dampen the fever from which that last exclamation sprang, not even his father's peculiar silence.

"He's engaged to Carol Landis. Evelyn told him that he surely threw her down flat, after years of devotion, too. She said she'd try to forgive him, however, if he'd come to tea next Sunday and bring Carol Landis with him."

"Forgive whom?" mechanically Judge Jameson asked the question.

"Why, Jimmy—Jimmy Gordon. She was only joking, of course. And we—we're going to announce both engagements at the same time in his paper. Jimmy says it will be an exclusive item—an out-and-out scoop for the *Courier*. I'm pretty lucky. I didn't think I had any chance—and now—now——"

It was quiet for an infinitesimal space. And then, abruptly, Judge Jameson threw back his head and

laughed. And his son joined in, diffidently, unaware how shrill his father's laughter was, how nearly bordering on hysteria.

"It's funny," he said, as he started slowly to leave the room, "it's funny how things turn out. And I'm glad you take it this way. I was a pretty mean sort of a sneak, but I want you to know that hereafter I'm going to try to be a—a little worthy of Evelyn."

At the door he paused.

"What?" he asked, in answer to an unintelligible sound from his father. "Oh, good-night!"

He passed from the room.

Left alone, Judge Jameson's hysterical paroxysms stopped with a painful gasp. He swung around in his chair toward the empty doorway. And to the empty doorway he spoke, querulously, pettishly.

"I didn't say good-night," he muttered; "I said good God!"

CHAPTER XXI

RANK MELODRAMA

IN the last few days that had immediately preceded the foregathering of Warchester's citizenry to witness the acclaim of T. Elihu Banks as the Senatorial candidate of the Commonwealth, public opinion had undergone a subtle, but unmistakable readjustment. Such changes in sentiment are always hard to analyze; usually it is next to impossible to state exactly when, or why, the change began to take place. But the fact remains that Warcheser, vaguely perturbed by it, had for days been experiencing that metamorphosis.

Perhaps it was the odd silence of the *Courier*, following hard upon the heels of its scurrilous attack on T. Elihu, that had caused the first insidious suspicion to creep into the brain of the man upon the street. For having challenged T. Elihu, and received no public reply, abruptly—so abruptly in truth as to make it seem almost ominous—the *Courier* closed all mention of the matter with a calmly confident prediction that "Mr. Banks, in spite of the high enthusiasm of the body of estimable citizens behind him, would in rising to his introduction as the chief

speaker in the coming rally at the old Palace Theater, respond with his customary eloquence—and decline, with thanks.”

Looking through the columns of the *Transcript* without finding a semblance of a reply to that prediction was disquieting. Wainwright, with his well-known prodigality of phrase, had merely repeated again the many qualifications of the city’s most prominent citizen for the position of honor and trust which they proposed to thrust upon him, and emphasized his manifold public works. But even in that Wainwright could not be specific. With the *Courier’s* pertinent questions concerning the paving deal (which it characterized as the biggest steal since the city’s inception), the trolley extension and real estate juggling at the north edge of the town, still unsatisfied, he could scarcely be expected to enumerate them with pride. And, somehow, generalization in these matters, though it was ever so glowing and grateful, failed exactly to answer in this case.

The Reverend Watson Duncan had spoken upon the subject from his pulpit. Bitterly he inveighed against the influence of a corrupt press, and with a sonority undeniably eloquent, begged them not to heed the heresy of a false prophet.

But, also, it leaked into town that a young “preacher,” by the name of Blair, had introduced the same topic in his country chapel, at the finish of the regular morning sermon, and discussed it for some twenty earnest minutes, not with impassioned flights of oratory, but soberly. Almost conversation-

ally he had spoken from the edge of the "ingrain" carpeted platform of the regrettable evil of headlong public sentiment, which condemns without a hearing, and worships unproved respectability as blindly. The allusion, in each case, was scarcely veiled. And when it became known that there were many of his congregation who even shared his views, when he pointed out that men such as Pegleg Hanlon were a blessing and not a curse to a community, it resulted in a mild sensation and much debate, until a report of far greater import swept it aside.

From one end of the city to the other, it was noised that Evelyn Latham had risen in the very middle of the Reverend Watson Duncan's tirade against James Gordon, proprietor of the *Courier* and his own stepson, and stalked out of St. Luke's; and that young Lloyd Jameson and her father—J. J. Latham—had followed, obviously seconding her bleak disapproval.

Immediately, at that news, to use the phrase which Wainwright would have employed, had his pencil been unsubsidized, "Warchester began to seethe beneath a surface of seeming calm."

Came the day of the rally, and simultaneously, Carl Hardy's arrival in Warchester, on the four-thirty express. Carol Landis and Jimmy met him at the station, but it was not until they had reached the *Courier* office that the subject of the new play, untidily projecting from the manager's coat pocket, was introduced. He drew it out, smoothed it, not without signs of vast amusement, into a semblance

of order, and laid it on the desk before him, without a word.

"Well?" Jimmy ventured tentatively.

"It's not finished," objected Hardy. "Only three acts! Where's the fourth?"

Jimmy's smile became a grin as he looked into Carol's face.

"Tonight I—I hope to be supplied with a logical curtain," he explained. "The act is finished, barring that. I waited because I wanted it to be convincing you know—and real—and very, very human!"

Hardy heard himself quoted without suffering any great loss of composure.

"I always wondered about that first act," he murmured. "So it was—yourself, eh?"

It was Carol's soft laughter that sent the blood into Jimmy's thin cheeks.

"All but the glorified parts," he defended himself. "Scarcely an—autobiography."

"Splendid!" mused Hardy. "I wish I could be young again." And then, laughingly: "Oh, I knew what you were up to, after I'd read one page of that second act—the return of the prodigal—ten years later! But what's the curtain going to be, Jimmy—vindication, young virtue triumphant—honor and reputation retrieved?"

But the tall and slightly stooped editor of the *Courier* had recovered his equanimity. He laughed with them, even while he was ordering them from the premises.

"You can search me!" he answered, humorously

grave. "But it's bound to be logical and convincing, and true to life. Because they're going to create it, not I. And now, here's an order for two seats, reserved for you in the balcony. You can watch it develop, yourself. Tivotson and I are very busy for an hour or so. We—we are men of the moment, so to speak!"

It was hot and oppressive in the pit of the old Palace Theater, but men forgot the heat as the principals whose entrance they had been awaiting, finally filed in from the wings: Dayton, chairman of the Civic Improvement Society; Blake, United States Senator from a neighbor State; District Attorney Jameson, the Reverend Watson Duncan, and T. Elihu Banks.

The representatives of the press, Wainwright, with his ribboned spectacles; Tivotson, stone sober in spite of a mad gleam in his eye, and Jimmy Gordon, found places at a long table at the extreme left of the stage.

The Palace Theater had been the scene of many political gatherings, not so different, in externals, from this one which the Reverend Watson Duncan now opened with a brief, almost martial prayer. And yet there was scarcely a man in the house who, lifting his bared head at the finish of that plea for divine guidance did not feel that he was no longer a participant, but rather an onlooker, waiting for the presentation of a performance of absorbing tensity.

Dayton rose and spoke with that fluent jocularly

which had made him the town's official toastmaster, waxing grave only when it was time to introduce the first speaker of the evening, the well known and well beloved Mr. Blake, Senator from ———.

Blake rose and wooed them with honeyed flattery; boomed outworn commonplaces at them concerning their duty to state and nation; accentuated the crying need at the Capitol of such men as Mr. Banks (and himself), and, a little perfunctorily, returned to his chair.

A patter of applause rewarded his effort. But Warchester audiences were always accustomed to encourage the first or second acts of a visiting company in just such measure. It signified neither approval nor disapproval.

And now as Dayton came again to his feet, talking a little more rapidly this time, here and there men began to notice that of the three men at the press table Jimmy Gordon alone was busy preparing copy. Wainwright, vaguely disquieted, was watching Judge Jameson, and wondering if the District Attorney had become suddenly indisposed, for he was very white. Tivotson, bolt upright and rigid, and trembling like a snake ready to strike, was watching T. E. Banks. But the editor of the *Courier* was busy, seemingly enjoying his task, for he was smiling above his racing pencil.

The effect of a certain sort of a smile—a quiet, amused, lazy smile—upon the emotions of those who behold it, offers a nice problem in psychology. Having sought his bowed figure and glimpsed that smile,

the eyes of men lingered upon it, until the whole house, in a sort of fascinated expectancy, was watching him.

They watched him while Dayton introduced "T. Elihu Banks, Warchester's first United States Senator." While they cheered, in a fashion markedly unconvinced, they watched Gordon—and during the first half of the profoundly dispirited speech of acceptance which Mr. Banks delivered in a husky voice. And when Gordon suddenly gathered his sheets together, and stacked them with some nicety, and T. Elihu faltered, and finished with his handkerchief knotted wet in one hand, and his forehead dripping wet, man for man they edged forward in their chairs.

T. Elihu had finished now, and it was quiet—dreadfully quiet, for a meeting that was to have been a "rousing indorsement of their candidate." T. Elihu had responded with his customary eloquence—but he had *not* declined with thanks. Yet he was a pitifully defeated figure, as he stuck to his guns.

"Tivotson!"

The little man, as if T. Elihu's defiance had just sunk home, lunged to his feet. The very bitterness of his impulse would have carried him across the stage, had not Jimmy's ringing word halted him. Gripping the table, hungry-faced and beseeching, he swung his head around toward his employer. Crisply Jimmy motioned him to a chair, and he obeyed.

And now Blake was on his feet, his face suffused

with indignation at an unheard of irregularity. Dayton was up, and the Reverend Watson Duncan, expostulating incoherently, when a gamin in the gallery raised his voice, ribald and irreverent, and distinct in every syllable.

"Cheese!" he warned the gentleman of the cloth. "You had your chance. I'ts too late for youse guys to do any more prayin' now!"

Maybe the prophetic partisanship of the gallery-ite checked a more active show of objection; maybe the reason for their moment of hesitation lay in the whimsical quality of Jimmy Gordon's smile. For, unchallenged, he had risen and come slowly down to the center of the stage, a tall and thin and familiar figure, reminiscent still of shiny blue serge, in spite of the conventional black and white which he was wearing.

There was no real need for him to wait a moment for silence. This was the moment they had been awaiting for days.

Whitey Garritty, who had been waiting even longer, took advantage of the momentary dereliction of one of those inconspicuous individuals whom Pegleg Hanlan had ordered to "hang around" each of the open exits. The alley blackness offered Whitey Garritty ideal cover. This time he tried not to hurry it.

An expression of incredulous dismay swept the face of Warchester's black sheep. He seemed half to lift one arm, as if to steady himself. The confined roar of the shot that spun him round and

dropped him on the stage made of the pit of the old Palace Theater a rioting mass of indignant, outraged men.

Pegleg Hanlon and Tivotson helped Abel carry him into Hanlon's Hotel and up to his room. And Pegleg, ten minutes later, met the girl with the pallid face whom Hardy steadied up the narrow stairway. She refused to be comforted, refused to be cheated by the smile of reassurance on his face, so he stood aside and bade her enter.

"A scratch," he scoffed at the horror-stricken eyes she raised from the stained strip of bandage about his head. "A scratch. He'll be around an' tell ye so himself, in a minute!"

And indeed Pegleg spoke the truth. For almost immediately Jimmy Gordon stirred and raised one hand as though the bandage irked him, and Carol's fingers flew to make it easier.

His eyes opened then. He shook his head at her, deprecatingly.

"Just like the old days, eh?" he said. "Always in trouble!"

The girl slipped to her knees and buried her head on his shoulder and clung to him. And, quizzically, over that bright head, Jimmy met the stunned concern of Hardy's regard.

"Your fourth act curtain, Hardy," he drawled, weakly, in a voice faintly satirical. "Logical—and real—and very, very human!" He made a gesture of amiable disgust. "Why! damn it, man," he finished, "it's—it's rank melodrama!"

CHAPTER XXII

INDIAN SUMMER

RAIN had fallen during the early hours before dawn, a gentle downpour, pleasantly cool and fragrant with the spicy suggestion of autumn leaves. Indeed, more than one patch of crimson, nipped by an early frost and blown from the trees on the Common, lay tightly pasted to the clean concrete surface of Front street, like drops of brilliant paint spilled here and there by a careless artisan.

Even the dingy sod of the Common had been renovated. It looked so lush and green that the lone commercial traveler who came out upon the Bay State veranda steps just before noon and faced in that direction to make the cannoneer and his mate a solemn salute, stood squinting at it critically, from eyes very wise in such a round and cherubic countenance.

The drummer, having missed his Saturday connection and arrived only that morning, had been forced to forego his jump to Providence because he dared not leave town without seeing Latham—J. J. Latham—personally, so one would reasonably have

expected him to find nothing of excellence on the scene of his broken schedule. To the contrary, he nodded his head at length and sighed his unqualified content.

"Don't weaken, boys," with preoccupied gravity he admonished the intrepid, twice-life-size pair which composed Warchester's martial statue. "It could be worse."

And then, chair and stiff brown derby tilted back at a dangerous angle, brown-buttoned shoes propped upon the rail, this stranded alien opened a damp copy of the *Sunday Transcript*.

A head-line and two pictures upon an inner sheet caught his vagrant eye. With quickly reawakened interest he picked the paper up and looked closer, nodding his head the next moment like one who has satisfactorily verified his knowledge of metropolitan affairs.

"Landis!" he spoke softly aloud. "Thought so. Opened here last night in a new piece, eh? Wonder how it—hallo!"

The other picture had intruded itself—the picture of the author of the new piece. And now, as he gazed at it more closely and recognition came, a queer expression spread slowly across his face.

Many times since the afternoon several months before when, with Mr. Dodge he had viewed the return of Warchester's prodigal son to the haunts of his youth, the drummer had vexed himself with conjecture concerning that shabby figure. In one

way its familiarity was easily accounted for. The drummer had never forgotten that other day, years back, when a cinder-soiled figure stood with the same Airedale which was waiting now on the platform with Abel Thompson, and watched a plum upholstered barouche clatter off up the street. But that memory was not entirely satisfacory. A persistent certainty that he had seen that thin face on still another, vastly different, occasion was nagging at him.

And now the pulse of triumphant recollection which shot across his cherubic face gave way immediately to a look less easily described. It had in it a light of inspired comprehension, and a gleam of unholy delight.

"Gordon James!" he breathed to himself. "Jimmy Gordon! Now, why couldn't you have guessed that, you poor boob, without a set of pictures to help you! His Own Home Town! O boy—O boy! And I was right around when it happened!"

But, little by little, as he attacked the body of Wainwright's report of the affair, his expression of delight was displaced by a mixture of ludicrous bewilderment and belligerent conviction. The drummer would have been hard put to it to explain just what note he had expected the press of Warchester to strike, but emphatically it was not that one sounded by the three columns which the *Transcript* devoted to the premiere of the night before.

". . . As for the play itself, there is either much to be said, or very, very little. A perfect conception, perfectly presented would cover the latest product of

Gordon James' brain and pen. But since it is also the work of Jimmy Gordon, our own townsman—boy, I very nearly wrote, for he is not yet in his thirties—such brief mention, no matter how laudatory, would hardly suffice.

“. . . Much of the atmosphere, much of the local color of his own home town Mr. Gordon has put into his new play by that name. Yet he deals also with more concrete things. In those four acts he has incorporated a mighty sermon against petty politics, and blind, intolerant hypocrisy which many cities of Warchester's class, who have lagged behind us in the last few years, will do well to witness and heed.”

There was more—much more!—all in Wainwright's best style, but at that point the dumfounded drummer stopped and let the paper slip from slack fingers.

“Well, I'm damned,” he whimpered. “I'm damned!”

Mr. Dodge, the manager of the Bay State, appeared the same instant in the doorway behind him.

“What's the matter?” he asked truculently. “Forget your samples somewhere?”

In his way the drummer was a student of human nature. He whirled now with a feverish eagerness for experimentation in his eye. But a newer development checked him.

Across the square the gentleman of color had come to his feet, smiling widely, as a pair of high-checked gray horses, harnessed to a bulbous, plum upholstered barouche, rounded Main street corner

and came swinging down Front, the clatter of their feet upon the pavement a marvelous imitation of those hoof-beats which trap-drummers were wont to beat out upon their shells, for the added vividness it lent to motion-picture steeds.

There was a man and a girl in the barouche, and a pile of worn bags, thickly belabeled. Both of them the drummer recognized instantly, but it was a long white streamer of ribbon whipping lazily behind on the breeze that held fascinated his gaze.

"Looks like a—a wedding," he ventured uncertainly, at length, and for once his speech, in the presence of Mr. Dodge, was faltering. He and Mr. Dodge were not congenial souls.

The manager of the hotel could not spare him even a pitying glance at that moment, though his reply came with the patness of a verbatim report.

"Jimmy Gordon and Miss Landis, his leadin' lady . . . married to-day at high noon . . . St. Luke's . . . that young rector, Blair, officiatin'. Duncan's retired."

The barouchs was nearing now. It was quite possible to see, even from the veranda of the Bay State, the splendid little smile upon the girl's curling lips. The Bay State manager was bending double, and repeating the salute at accurate intervals; the drummer found himself encountering Jimmy Gordon's pale blue, mildly amused regard, and suddenly he, too, was upon his feet, bowing, his round face pink, his stiff brown derby in one hand.

And Carol Gordon, nee Landis, bobbed her head

to him as the barouche rounded up to the platform and delivered them over to Abel.

"Where's the plump old party who used to——" He completed the question by waving a hand in the direction of the disappearing barouche.

Mr. Dodge's patronizing smile was withering.

"Banks!" he said. "I guess you ain't been long in this town. Old Banks? Bermuda—that's where they said he was going—or Havana. For his health!" He laughed, harshly. "Well, I guess most any of those places are healthier than jail!"

"Hum-m-m," murmured the drummer. "Turned crooked, eh?"

"Never was anything else! Sold out everything he had before he left, except his place up on the hill. Henderson's livery bought that rig of his that just brought Jimmy Gordon down to the station. And Jimmy Gordon—why, he used to drive a hack for Henderson, when he was a boy!"

Something in that epic announcement, something in the manager's bearing, seemed to challenge his transient guest. But the latter's eye had lost its eagerness for experimentation—its embattled gleam. He was silent so long that Mr. Dodge's face finally saddened with a realization that the question he had lingered to combat would never be asked.

He sighed, but turned back in the doorway.

"Well," he declared, "there was a lot of people in this town that used to run Jimmy Gordon down, till it got to be the fashion. But I—I told 'em! I knew he'd make good in the end."

It was quiet after that. The drummer was a philosopher. He only sat and smiled.

THE END

ONCE TO EVERY MAN
AND
THEN I'LL COME BACK TO YOU

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